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THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

A character from the game Metro Exodus is shown in a snowy, post-apocalyptic environment. The character is wearing a hooded jacket, goggles, and a tactical vest with multiple pouches. They are holding a large, cylindrical device (likely a flashlight or a small telescope) to their eye. The background features ruined buildings, a flying creature, and a small waterfall in the distance.

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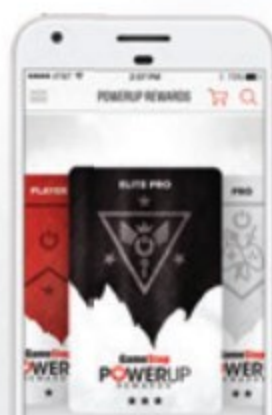


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ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com
@GI_AndyMc

299...

With Prince's "1999" playing in the background, I'm writing a letter about *Game Informer* approaching a milestone I never thought would happen: issue 300. On the eve of our big celebration, I look back and try to count how many people I will forget to thank. How many people made it all possible? So many readers, companies, and developers helped us when we needed it, or had faith in us when we sometimes lost faith in ourselves. And of course, all the members of Team Game Informer we have had over the years – all who have given a bit of themselves to make *Game Informer* the best it can be.

Game Informer has humble beginnings, and we have always tried to remain humble. Regardless of what people say on YouTube channels or in back rooms, *Game Informer* has always had the gamer at the center of its universe. Without that focus on trying to help gamers play and enjoy games, we would have lost our way long ago, and I believe companies would have lost faith in us to proudly display their works on our cover. This continues to be a source of pride for me, each and every month.

I have pride in the work of the *Game Informer* team, a group that puts it all on the line. Pride in the games we choose and the opportunities we have to make connections with the game developers themselves, who will never understand the level of respect we have for their work. I view them as the rockstars of our time. I may have grown used to their presence and comradery over the years, but the awe I feel for their work, for their sacrifice to make something special, has deep meaning for me.

So to everyone that has ever crossed paths with or supported *Game Informer*, I say thank you. I will never be able to properly express my level of gratitude, but let's just say you are better than a legendary in a loot box.

Unlike all the other milestones *Game Informer* has passed over the years, this time we wanted to make sure we took a moment to celebrate. Enjoy this amazing issue, then get ready for our 300th. If you can join us in Minneapolis on March 3 (check page 41), we would love to have you and get a chance to thank you in person. For those who can't make it, we will broadcast the festivities – so no matter what, mark 3/3 on your calendars. We have been working on this issue for a while now, and I can't wait to show you what we have in store.

Cheers,

0318

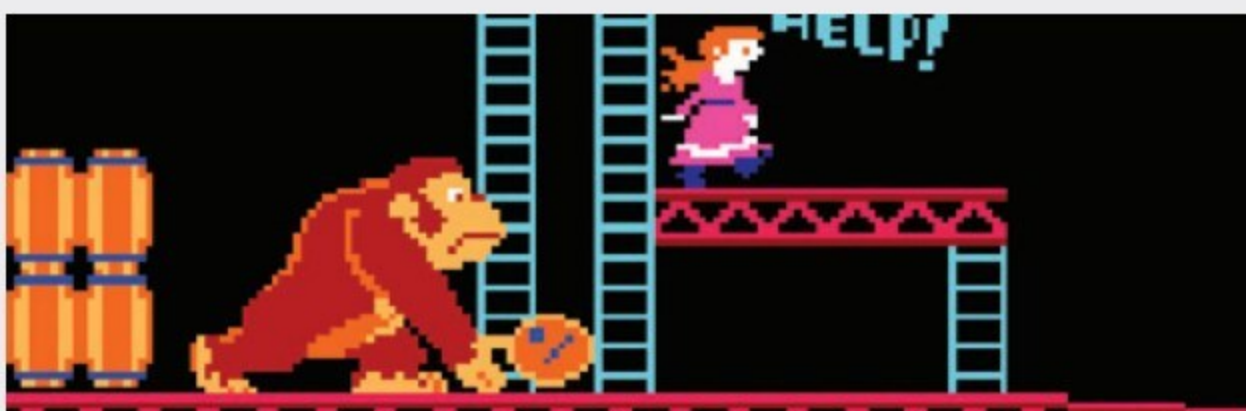
42 Metro Exodus

After two suffocating games set in the tunnels of Moscow, 4A Games' cult shooter transitions to the irradiated Russian countryside. We visited the studio headquarters to learn how the team plans to merge the series' signature linear, story-driven sequences with more open survival sandbox spaces. **by Matt Bertz**



12 Switching To Cardboard

Nintendo's next Switch innovation is an unexpected cardboard craft project, Labo.



14 Chronicling 40 Years Of Gaming

Compared to other entertainment media, video games are pretty young. Still, a lot has happened in the industry's 40 years.



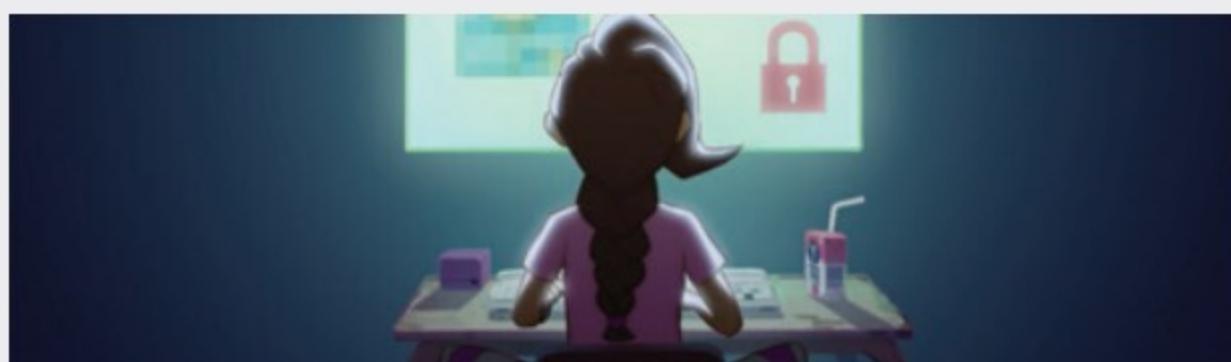
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We asked the co-creator of *Rick and Morty* and *The Stanley Parable*'s co-designer what they would do with gaming's biggest franchises.



26 Afterwords

Having a new Mario and a new Zelda in the same year is a rare occurrence. We spoke with the directors about their development.



28 Leaving Internet Freedom Behind

The way we use the internet might be changing, so we took a closer look at how the decisions surrounding net neutrality could affect gaming.



34 Interview: Tameem Antoniades

We spoke with *Hellblade*'s director about his personal history and what's next for *Ninja Theory*.



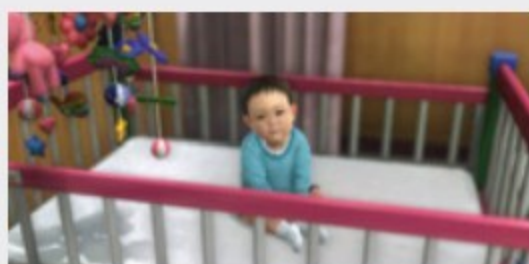
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Studio Ghibli may not be involved in the sequel, but there's still plenty to be excited about.

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When THQ collapsed, we feared the end of the Darksiders franchise. Thankfully, that's not the case.



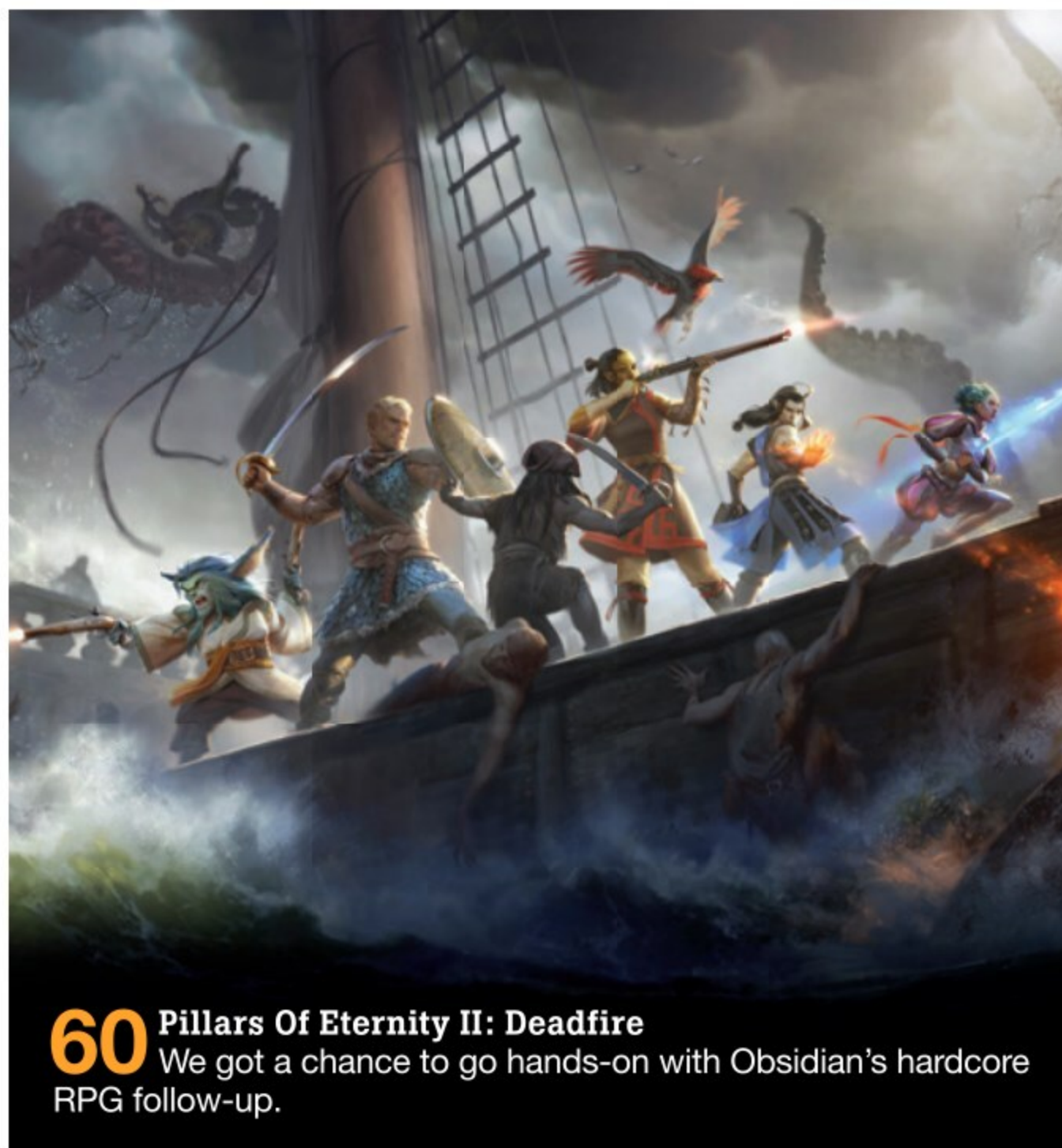
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2017 was a huge year for Yakuza, and Sega has no plans to let that momentum wane.



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The creator of You Must Build a Boat is doing something different for his new game.



84 Monster Hunter: World
The Monster Hunter series has always struggled to crack the American mainstream. That may change with World.



60 Pillars Of Eternity II: Deadfire
We got a chance to go hands-on with Obsidian's hardcore RPG follow-up.



75 Metal Gear Survive
We played a lot of Survive's single-player, fighting zombies and collecting resources. Here's our report.



76 Onrush
The team behind the MotorStorm series is going the arcade route for its next racer.



86 Dragon Ball FighterZ
Is FighterZ the greatest Dragon Ball video game ever made?



88 Lost Sphear
We were underwhelmed by I Am Setsuna, and bummed Tokyo RPG Factory's follow-up gave us a similar feeling.

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BIG DATE?

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New Edge 2-in-1 Shave Cream. Hydrating formula, with 50% more moisturizers than traditional shave gels, conditions skin throughout your shave.



Capcom's robot-murdering mascot got lots of buzz this month, as did our admittedly flawed quiz about his exploits. Hard drive space and micro-transactions were also popular topics. Well, unpopular really.

Mega Man-ia

I really have to commend you on the recent Mega Man 11 issue (297). Seeing my favorite game character and series of all time gracing the cover just filled me with glee. It took me back to my childhood and filled me with a sense of excitement and wonder all over again. The article was in-depth, featured great commentary from the team, and – for the first time in about 10 years – got me to finish an article. Thank you so much for rekindling that excitement. I'll be holding onto this one for the cover alone.

Sam Webb
via email

A hundred thanks for the awesome Mega Man article in issue 297. As an avid fan of the core series, I'm super excited for Mega Man 11, since it was both a surprise to me and a consolation for the disappointing Mighty No. 9. However, I have one qualm: There was no mention of the music or its composer(s). To me, the music is half the reason the series rocks in the first place. Other than that, you made my day!

Scott Lahmann
Owosso, MI

Having the Blue Bomber back on our cover was quite the thrill for us as well, and we are optimistic about Capcom's reverent and old-school

approach to reviving the series. Unfortunately, Capcom wasn't ready to discuss Mega Man 11's music during our trip, but based on the tracks we heard, it's safe to say Mega Man fans won't be disappointed. To learn more about the game, head to gameinformer.com/megaman.

More Like Mega Moron

In issue 297's Game Over, you challenged readers to a quick quiz of "Mega Man Boss or Comic Book Character?" It was an easy quiz for those of us who've followed the Blue Bomber since the NES, but you made a mistake. Question 14 is Bright Man or Shadow Man, with your correct answer being Bright Man from Mega Man 4. But how could you forget Shadow Man from Mega Man 3? He's a robot ninja, and is easily the coolest boss in the game – even if he does get taken down by one of the lamest weapons ever.

Brian Sellers
via email

We received an absurd number of responses from Mega Man fans this month pointing out that Shadow Man is indeed a robot master. However, he was also featured in the Mega Man comic series, so they nullify each other. Then again a bunch of the other robot masters are also in the comics. Hmmm ... clearly,

Ben Reeves should've defeated Factchecker Man before creating the quiz.

Dress For Success

I really love games like The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario, etc. However, I'm afraid to show my love for them by wearing video-game-themed clothes (like with the Triforce or something) because I don't know everything about the series. I was born in the early 2000s so I didn't really grow up with the old games, and it's hard to track them down. I'm worried that if I do wear gaming clothes, people are going to ask me questions and expect me to know all the answers, when really I just happen to love the games I've played. You guys seem to have great advice on this kind of stuff so, help?

Natalie St. John
via email

You don't need to pass some random stranger's history quiz in order to wear a shirt you like, Natalie, and you also don't need to justify your love of games to anyone. Gamers come from all different backgrounds, and have different levels of interest in the hobby. If someone feels the need to question your "gamer credibility" and act as a gatekeeper, that's their problem, not yours. If you're a fan, go ahead and show it!

Contact Us

Send your questions, comments, and rants to feedback@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured in the magazine!



Jackpot!

I loved the Top 10 Outrageous Microtransactions list (issue 297). Bethesda even revived the infamous horse armor in its latest foray into microtransactions: Fallout 4's Creation Club has its own Horse Power Armor ... which I may or may not have bought.

Royce Miller
via email

Your Top 10 Outrageous Microtransactions article was great and just made it more obvious that players with less money come last. Metal Gear Solid V's insurance is just awful. Counter-Strike Go's "chance" to unlock the item you want is sad. Someday I hope to see a developer keep it fair by making a great game and charging one price upfront for all the experiences that their game offers. Then let the skill and effort of the player determine the rewards, not the amount of money they can spend.

Elliott Berkley
via email

Games like that are out there, Elliott – there are just fewer of them. In fact, the way things are trending, we could probably annualize our Top 10 Outrageous Microtransactions list. We'd love to believe publishers will take your wise words (or our blatant shame list) to heart and change their ways, but the truth is as long as gamers keep buying them, companies will keep making them.

A Good Start

I'm a nearly 50-year-old gamer, and I purchased the Xbox One X at launch; I have never before purchased a console at launch. While I don't regret my decision, I am in agreement with Andrew Reiner's hardware review ("Power For What Purpose," issue 297). There isn't a whole lot out there that's built specifically for this new console, but I give Microsoft credit for at least having a large number of games ready to play with Xbox One X enhancements – including several Xbox 360 titles, which look and perform better than ever. I'm excited for the future to see titles that take advantage of all the X has to offer.

Scott C. Smith
via email

As we noted last month, we've heard from a lot of readers who are upset with the concept of a "mid-gen refresh" for gaming systems. Those who have actually bought an Xbox One X, however, have so far mirrored Scott's sense of cautious optimism. Hopefully Microsoft can deliver on the system's full potential, without leaving previous Xbox One owners behind. Frankly, that sounds like an impossible paradox, but at least they've got a few years to work on a solution.

Making It Quick

So I got two Switch games recently: Golf Story (because of your review last issue – it's so good!) and NBA 2K18 for the hubby. The Switch says it can't download 10.1GB for NBA. What? Why is there no space on the Switch?! I have to pay \$75 for a measly 200GB card when my PS4 comes with 1TB! Even my iPad has 128GB! Nintendo is killing me with their stingy memory space! I apologize for the rant, but knew you'd understand more than anyone.

Megan Buller
via email

Indeed we do, Megan – and lucky for you we had just enough space of our own for a bite-sized tirade!

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Going by the in-game time, would a two-minute radio song last two hours in the GTA's world?"

Huh. We never thought about that before ...

"Also, would it sound like what we hear to the characters in the game? Or would it be a garbled mess?"

You are blowing our minds right now!

"Gostaria de saber se existe a chance da Nintendo lançar o Nintendo 64 Clássic Edition?"

De modo provável.

Best Subject Line To A Feedback Letter:

"Ben Reeves Must Pay!!!"

Question Of The Month:

What would be your video game weapon of choice in a real-life post-apocalyptic wasteland?

gi spy

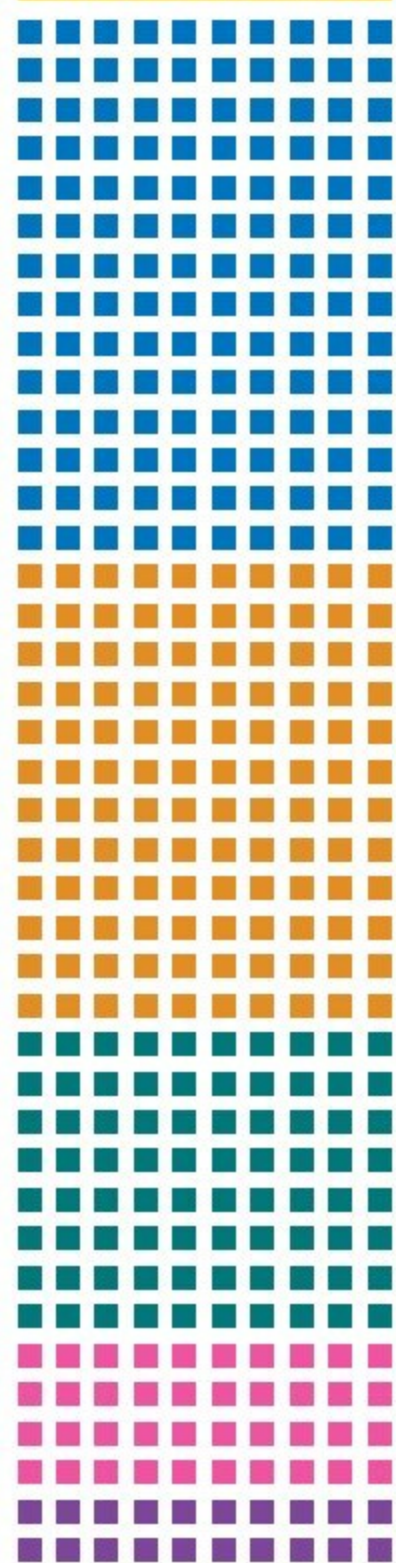


(Left) 4A Games' Sergei Karmalsky, Jon Bloch, and Andriy Prokhorov taught us all about Metro Exodus this month ... and how to hug ourselves.

(Right) Dan Tack picked up a few tips from professional CCG player and designer Brian Kibler at last year's Blizzcon.

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

On Your Mind



- Mega Man Quiz Correctors (We get it!)
- New Year's Gaming Resolutions
- "Microtransactions ARE Outrageous!"
- Hard Drive Space Haters
- Xbox One X Proponents



Get Your Act Together!

In issue 297, we asked readers what bad gaming habit they were aiming to fix in the new year. If you were too lazy to come up with your own resolution, here are a few you can steal.

My resolution is to finish games I start and genuinely like. Too often I get within a stone's throw of beating a game, only to put it on hiatus as real life demands attention. Then I forget about it for the next game that catches my eye. From now on, no more new games until an old one is finished.

Asher Tye

I seem to have developed a nasty habit of swearing like a sailor when I play video games.

I never swear any other time besides that. My husband finds it hilarious, but I really would like to change that. I plan to do it gradually by replacing curse words with different words. So I apologize if in the future any Overwatch players hear, "Son of a boomerang!"

Stacy Warner

I plan to stop neglecting game time for studying and going to work. Who wants to be an adult anyway?

Samuel Caloras

In 2018, I'm going to finally kick my rage to the curb ... or at least try to stop breaking controllers after frustrating gaming sessions.

Andrew Nix

(Left) This month we said goodbye to another round of exceptional interns/NERF mercenaries: Cody Mello-Klein, Keenan McCall, and George Ash. Thanks, guys!

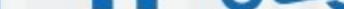
(Right) Reiner got a screaming lesson from Kinda Funny's Greg Miller and Sony's John Drake during PSX.

(continued on page 10)





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WINNER

1 Steven Wilson

After the subdued cel-shading of *Breath of the Wild*, a grungy comic-book Link might be just the ticket for the next *Zelda*.

2 Katelyn Croom

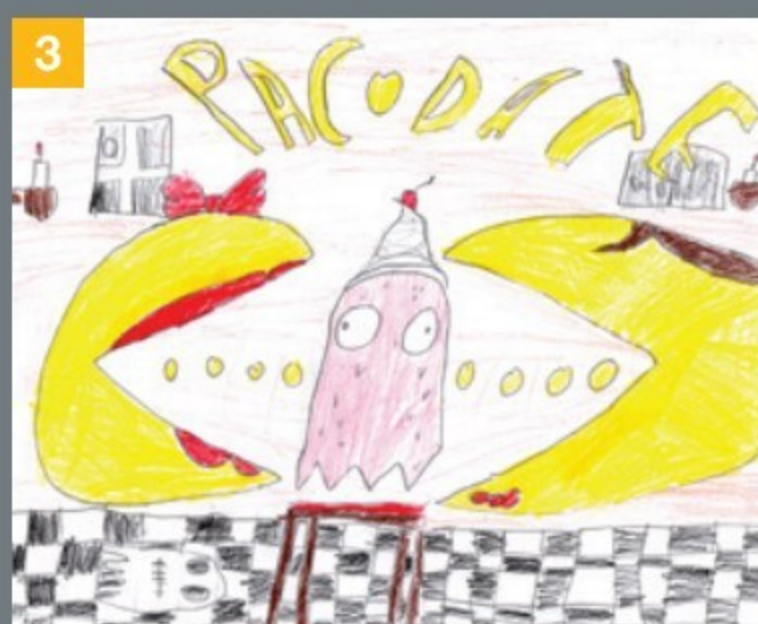
You'd think a stealthy rogue assassin would choose a less conspicuous hat.

3 Caius Van Haute

Our artist may be young, but the concept of *Pac Date* is kind of ingenious!

4 Sarah Boyce

Just when you thought Kirby couldn't get more adorable!



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(Left) Reiner cooled down afterwards with Chair's Donald and Laura Mustard.

(Right) Reeves certainly knows how to strike a pose. So do SNK's Josh Weatherford and Yasuyuki Oda.



FLIP THE RAINBOW →



← TASTE THE RAINBOW

*Switching To Cardboard

Nintendo combines packaging material and video games to craft Labo



NOTABLES

- 14 40 years of defining moments in video games
- 20 top 10 dumbest plans
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by Kyle Hilliard

On the morning of January 17 Nintendo cryptically teased, “Tune in to discover a new interactive experience for Nintendo Switch that’s specially crafted for kids and those who are kids-at-heart.” Assumptions ranged from a game geared toward young players to a redesigned controller molded for young hands. Ultimately, however, Nintendo revealed something no one expected: Labo. This collection of cardboard kits tasks players with putting together peripherals that interact with video games using the Switch.

Nintendo introduced Labo (pronounced “lab,” like the dog, and “oh!,” like the exclamation) by showing someone building a functioning piano entirely out of cardboard. The Switch’s screen docks into the front of the piano, while the right Joy-Con is placed into the back of the cardboard instrument. Nintendo also showed a motorcycle steering device, a small cardboard house, and a fishing rod, among other creations. The largest object, however, is a backpack and headset that let you play a game where you are a giant robot, punching buildings and stomping neighborhoods. Presumably, this is what

became of Project Giant Robot, a game Nintendo showed to press at E3 2014.

The directions to assemble these Labo creations (or as Nintendo refers to them, Toy-Cons) are displayed on the Switch’s screen, playing out like an animated set of Lego instructions. You can also zoom in and out and rotate the on-screen Toy-Con as you follow the instructions. In a clever bit of engineering education, you can even see exactly how the controllers are interacting with the cardboard creation by swiping on screen to reveal an X-ray view of what’s happening inside the Toy-Con. Looking inside the piano, for example, reveals the Joy-Con’s IR camera (which has been a mostly unused part of the controller since the console’s launch) looks at what keys you’re pressing on the piano, and transmits that data to the Switch to display action and sounds on-screen.

Labo is another example of Nintendo forging its own path and ignoring the competition in favor of experimentation. Reactions to Labo have ranged from frustration at Nintendo for focusing on things like this when it can’t even get a proper online service off the ground, to exuberance over the

It Costs How Much?!

Despite being made of cardboard, Labo carries a price tag comparable to your average video game. For its launch on April 20, Nintendo plans to offer two Labo kits:

- **Toy-Con 01: Variety Kit** is a sampler of sorts, featuring multiple creations. The kit sells for \$69.99 and includes two Toy-Con RC cars, a fishing rod, a house, a motorbike, and the piano that Nintendo used to introduce Labo to the world. This kit also features the software necessary to bring these Toy-Cons to life.
- **Toy-Con 02: Robot Kit** costs \$79.99. This package includes the giant destruction robot game and everything you need to craft the headset and backpack necessary for playing the game.

Additionally, Nintendo plans to sell a \$9.99 Customization Kit that includes a collection of markers and stickers that you can use to decorate the Toy-Cons.

playful idea.

Despite the undeniable creativity behind the product, there are some valid concerns. The price is surprising (see sidebar) ranging between \$70 and \$80 for the two launch kits. We also have questions about durability. Labo is being developed for younger players, and younger players are notoriously flippant with their toys. How long will these cardboard constructs last in the hands of a destructive eight-year-old? Can you buy a replacement fishing rod if and when it starts to fall apart? We also fear a repeat of the Wii’s flooded peripheral market. Attaching a plastic racket to the Wii remote did not make Wii Tennis any more fun than it already was. Will Labo’s Toy-Cons actually improve their included games, or just make them unwieldy? We also wonder if Labo relates to the upcoming Yoshi Switch game, which uses cardboard as its material theme.

We obviously have plenty of questions about Labo, but that’s because it’s unlike anything we’ve played before. Nintendo is trying something different, and regardless if the gamble pays off, we’re excited to and try it out in April. 💎

The Mystery Toy-Cons

On April 20 we know you will be able to buy and build RC cars, a house, a motorbike, a piano, and a robot, but Labo’s reveal trailer teased a number of other creations. Some of these things were relatively tame, but others showed gameplay applications that are difficult to parse.

The trailer included footage of a stick figure trying to balance while wearing a Joy-Con on its back. We also saw a flapping bird Toy-Con being held like a pair of binoculars and a steering wheel with an accompanying gas pedal. Nintendo also teased a retro film camera with a lens that could be rotated, as well as a gun (or at least a toy version of a gun), cardboard housing that lets you manipulate a Joy-Con like a joystick, and something that looked like it could be a kick pedal for a bass drum.

Presumably, these Toy-Cons will come at a later date, pending the success of the first wave of Toy-Cons.

40 Years Of Defining Moments In Video Games

The exact origin of video games is a heavily debated subject. Some people say it should be January 25, 1947, the date when Thomas Goldsmith, Jr. and Estle Ray Mann filed a patent for a cathode ray tube amusement device, which allowed a user to move a vector dot toward targets. Others say the date should be August 25, 1950, when Josef Kates debuted a digital game of tic-tac-toe called Bertie the Brain at the Canadian National Exhibition.

What we know for certain is the most important game

creator of our time began working in video games 40 years ago. Shigeru Miyamoto joined Nintendo then and is still going strong today.

Using Miyamoto's first day as a starting point, we combed four decades of gaming news and developments to pinpoint notable moments that helped define each year.

What you are about to read is a chronological shotgun blast of points of interest distilled into a headline. We hope it gives you a quick, yet deep, look at the history of games.

by Andrew Reiner

1977

Shigeru Miyamoto joins Nintendo as an apprentice in the planning department

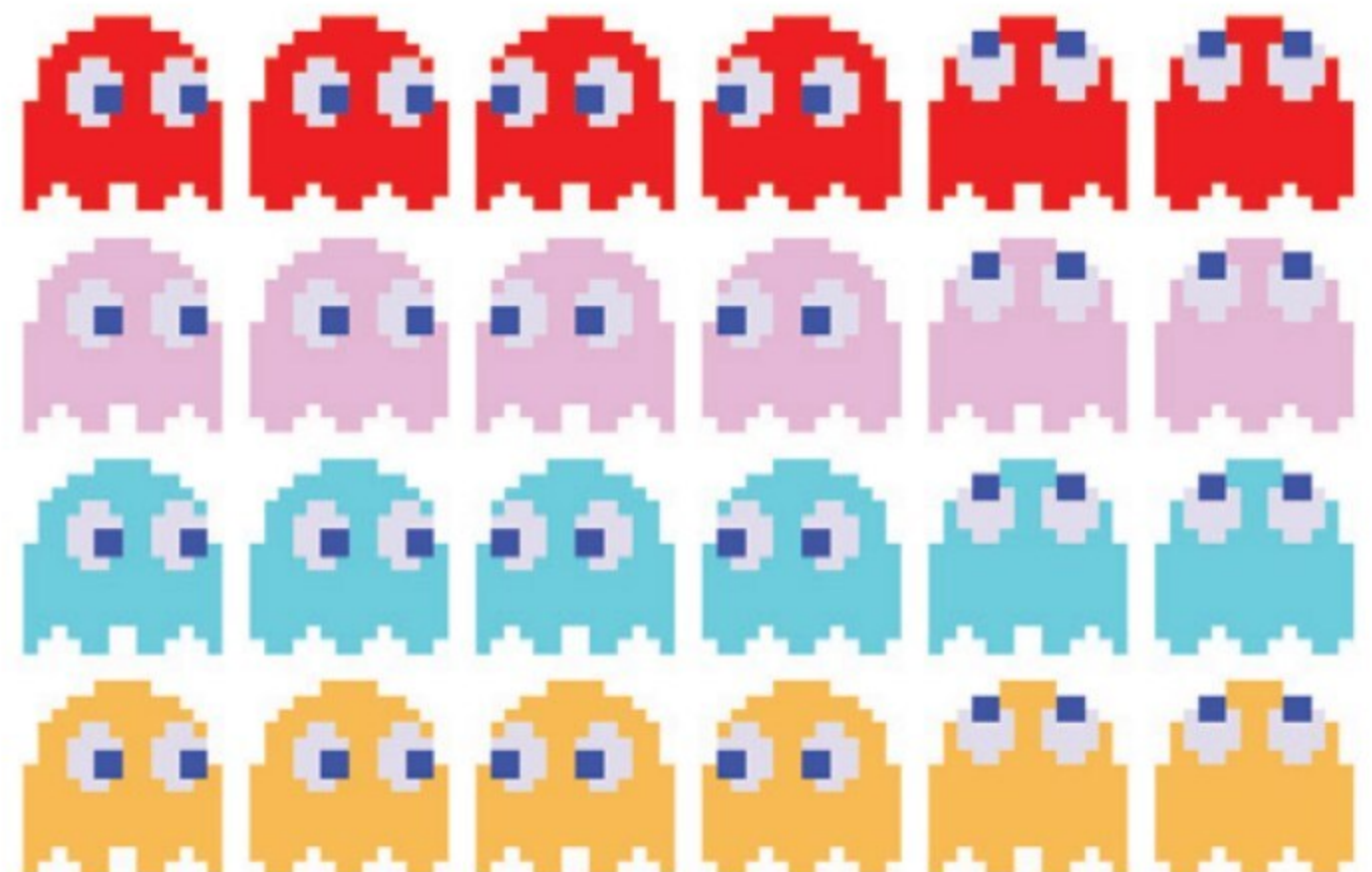


1978

Nintendo develops and publishes its first video game, Computer Othello

1979

Three programmers demand better treatment from Atari, leave company to form Activision



1980

Pac-Man explodes in arcades to the tune of \$1 billion in quarters in its first year, according to some estimates

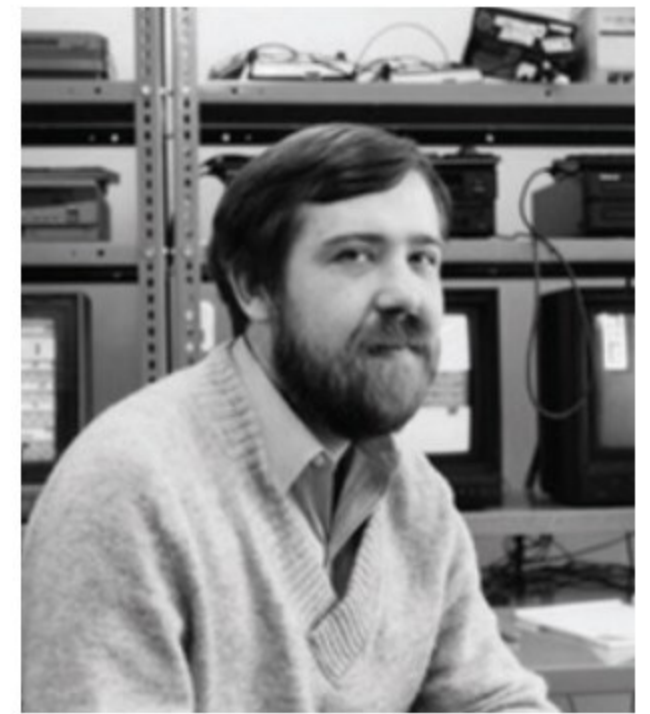


1981

Nintendo couldn't secure the Popeye license; Miyamoto instead turns to *King Kong* as inspiration for his arcade game, *Donkey Kong*

1982

Buckner & Garcia's
"Pac-Man Fever" peaks at
number nine on the Billboard
Hot 100



1984

Alexey Pajitnov
creates Tetris

1983

**THE FLOODED CONSOLE MARKET LEADS
TO THE GREAT VIDEO GAME CRASH**



1985

**The Nintendo Entertainment System
launches in America**

1986

**Sega releases the Master
System**

1987

Metroid and
Zelda join
Nintendo's
growing list
of franchises in
the U.S.

1988

**EA publishes
first John
Madden
football game**

1989

**Nintendo
sues Atari
subsidiary
Tengen over
Tetris and
unlicensed
NES games,
wins both
cases**



1990

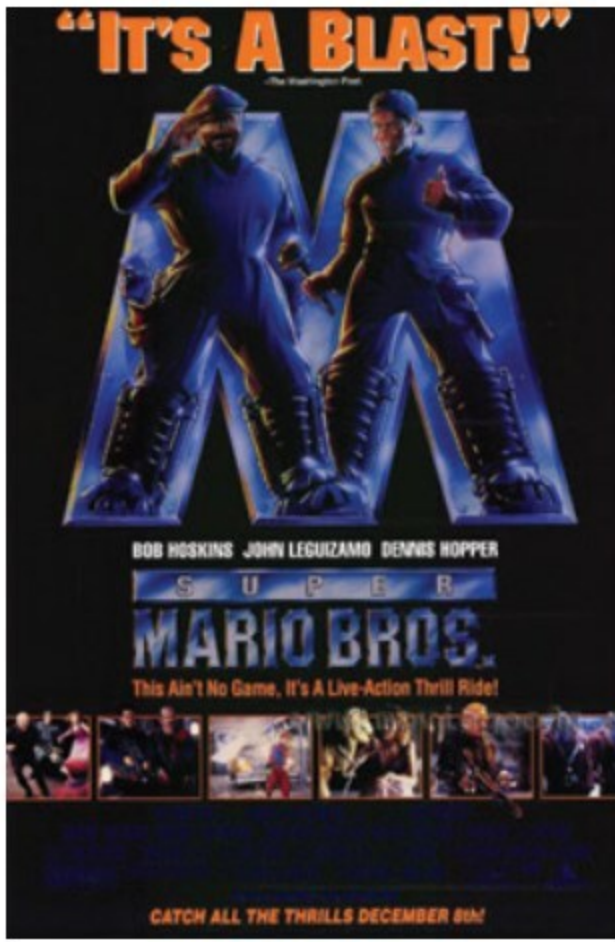
The first Nintendo
World Championships
competitions are
held within 29 cities,
a limited-edition
cartridge is created
for the event

1991

**THREE GRADUATE STUDENTS
FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA FORM SILICON
& SYNAPSE (NOW BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT)**

1992

Gore splashes in
arcades with the
release of *Mortal
Kombat*



1993

**SUPER MARIO BROS.
HITS THEATERS**

1994

**The Interactive Digital
Software Association
forms the Entertainment
Software Rating Board
(ESRB)**

1995

**PlayStation debuts
in a \$4 million booth
at a new show
called the Electronic
Entertainment Expo
(E3); Michael Jackson
makes an appearance**



1996

Nintendo releases Nintendo 64; Mario moves to 3D

1998

*The analog stick-equipped
DualShock controller is
released for PlayStation in
North America*

1999

9-9-99 



1997

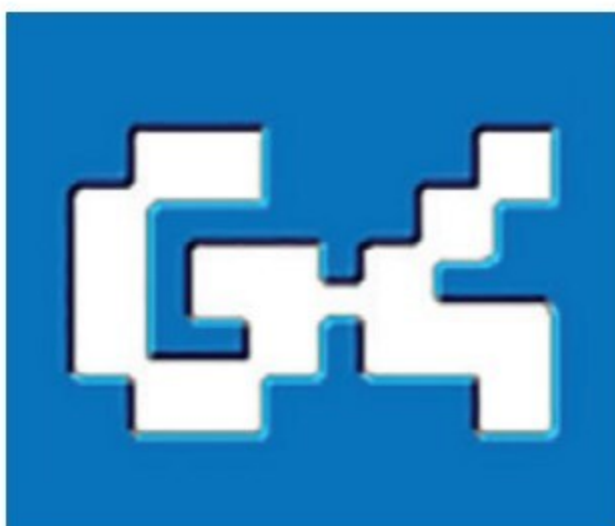
Role-playing games become cinematic
with the debut of Final Fantasy VII

2000

Gamers take on virtual lives in The Sims

2001

Sega exits the hardware
business to develop
games for all systems



2002

**Charles Hirschhorn debuts
G4 Television, an all-gaming
cable channel**

2003

Valve
Corporation
launches digital
platform Steam
for PC gaming

2004

**Blizzard releases
world-beating
MMO World of
Warcraft**



2005

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas secret leads to the “Hot Coffee” controversy

2006

Ralph Baer is awarded the National Medal of Technology from U.S. President George W. Bush

2007

Bungie Studios departs Microsoft, but Halo remains

2008

ELECTRONIC ARTS TRIES, BUT FAILS, TO BUY TAKE-TWO FOR \$2 BILLION

2009

Nintendo announces total shipments of Nintendo DS top 100 million units worldwide



2010

Controller-free gaming arrives in Microsoft's Kinect

2011

SONY SHUTS DOWN PLAYSTATION NETWORK FOR WEEKS FOLLOWING A SECURITY BREACH; 77 MILLION ACCOUNTS ARE EXPOSED



2012

Mass Effect 3 releases to controversy over ending, BioWare offers extended cut later in year

2013

LUCASARTS AND THQ CEASE TO BE

2014

Microsoft acquires Minecraft for \$2.5 billion

2015

Konami pulls P.T. from PlayStation 4; Hideo Kojima leaves company



2016

BLIZZARD RELEASES OVERWATCH

2017

Nintendo unifies console and handheld gaming through Switch

Survive Disaster In Strategic Indie Hits

The advent of early access means gamers get a glimpse into the game development process sooner than they might have in years past. Players make a trade, eschewing polish, balance, and complete game modes for the chance to explore a new experience. This month, I played two such promising releases. While neither are feature-complete yet, the strategic options and survival fun on offer should make both titles worth watching. *by Matt Miller*

Oxygen Not Included comes from Klei Entertainment, the same folks who brought us *Don't Starve*. The DNA of that game is apparent from the moment you boot up this new outer-space simulation, in which you must nurture a fledgling asteroid colony, even as the counters are constantly ticking down to your community's destruction. The cute visuals are great, filled with goofy-eyed colonists, weird creatures, and cartoonish caverns to explore. But that aesthetic presentation belies the brutal and complex nature of the game, in which players must work fast to set up infrastructure, build new facilities, expand the work force, and (as the title implies,) keep the air flowing. Expect to start a lot of new colonies.

My time exploring the subterranean tunnels didn't start out well, as *Oxygen Not Included* expects you to do a good bit of trial and error on the path to successful colony management. My initial three colonists quickly succumbed to the rigors of space exploration, and that was that. But it did queue up some good ideas that helped my next

run go a bit better. That approach to challenge should be inviting to many players who enjoy the process of picking up tricks as they go, and using failure as a tool to reach future success.

More than demanding experimentation, Klei's newest game presents challenge through its many interlocking systems. Players must manage unique strengths and dramatic weaknesses for each of their duplicants, the cloned colonists that populate their rocky and seemingly uninhabitable bastion. From greater speed and lower oxygen consumption to irritable bowel syndrome and narcolepsy, it's a real trick to stay on top of their quirks. You're also juggling temperature, gases that interact poorly with one another, plant yields, and plenty more. *Oxygen Not Included* is an anthill with a lot of strategic potential, and one that even in this early phase is showcasing a lot of depth. Check it out on Steam Early Access.

Steam is also home to another game of survival and colony building, but one with a very different feel and presentation. **They Are Billions** draws from a

lot of different source material, but is a survival-oriented real-time strategy game at its heart. And it's all about zombies. In this steampunk-flavored strategy title, players build up a colony from a single central command center, adding tents for workers, sawmills for lumber, and military complexes to pump out troops, just to name a few options. The presentation is clean and easy to understand, with controls and HUD that should be immediately useable by anyone who has spent time in *Starcraft* or a similar game.

The element that makes things different here is the presence of the infected. These zombie-like beings litter the countryside, often starting just barely outside the visible range of your starting buildings. Wait more than a few minutes, and they begin to attack your people, and more of the gruesome baddies arrive all the time. The game's name comes from the absolutely overwhelming numbers of these shambling monsters, who eventually arrive in thousands-strong hordes that seem unstoppable, easily overwhelming anything but the most stalwart defenses.

Numantian Games has crafted an addictive formula with this zombie-themed RTS. The constant push and pull between defense and going further afield for resources takes a lot of time to master, and the game's bleak but appealing visual and audio presentation is on point. If you have the chance, it's worth racing against the clock to see how long you can survive the untamed masses, even as the developer continues to tweak and adjust the game for maximum fun. 🎮



Oxygen Not Included
PC



They Are Billions
PC



Their
cell tower



Our
cell tower

**Want the same coverage as the big carriers for
a lot less? It's time for Straight Talk.®**

**ultimate
UNLIMITED**

4G LTE[†] DATA, TALK & TEXT

\$55
/mo
NO CONTRACT

Video typically streams at DVD quality

At Straight Talk Wireless we use the same cell towers as the big carriers but we don't pay to build or maintain them. So you get the same great nationwide coverage on America's largest and most dependable 4G LTE[†] networks and your phone works in more places for a lot less. Find out more at StraightTalk.com

**Straight
Talk**
wireless

[†]To get 4G LTE speed, you must have a 4G LTE capable device and 4G LTE SIM. Actual availability, coverage and speed may vary. LTE is a trademark of ETSI. A month equals thirty days. Please refer always to the latest Terms and Conditions of Service at StraightTalk.com.

Only at
Walmart 

DUMBEST PLANS

by Brian Shea



Starting A World War To Fight A Demon

Tekken 6

The fighting game genre has many outlandish stories and characters, but Jin Kazama's plan in Tekken 6 takes the cake. After assuming control of the Mishima Zaibatsu conglomerate, Jin declares war on all nations of the world, sending the planet into a death spiral in order to lure out the demon Azazel.



The Illusive Plan

Mass Effect Trilogy

A fleet of ancient, genocidal machines are on their way to wipe us out, but the Illusive Man thinks he can control them by synergizing with their technology. The plan backfires and the Reapers end up controlling him and, in turn, greatly influencing Commander Shepard. Oops!



Getting Murdered Just To Live

Resident Evil

Albert Wesker's plan involved him faking his own death, injecting himself with a deadly virus, actually dying, then allowing the virus to resuscitate him with a distinct lack of humanity. At least it gave him an excuse to wear sunglasses inside.



Destroying The Moon To Hold Earth Hostage

Sonic Adventure 2

Dr. Eggman wanted to take over Earth, but blowing up half the moon hardly seems like a great idea for an alleged genius. Good luck running a planet with unstable oceans, molten moon pieces raining down, and unpredictable orbital patterns, idiot!



Freeing And Angering The One Man Who Can Stop You

Bionic Commando

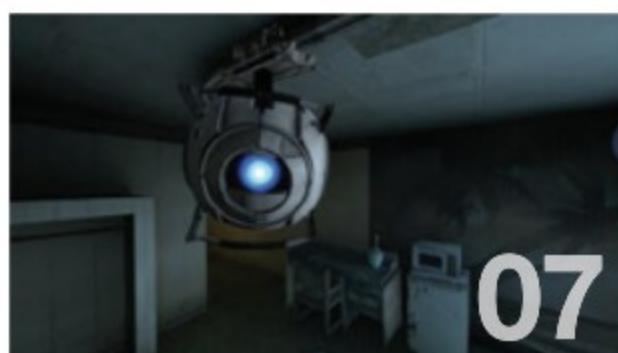
Nathan Spencer learns that his bionic arm is made up of parts of his missing wife. Not only is this messed up, but the man who freed him from prison, Super Joe, was responsible. Once Spencer learns this fact, he's obviously none too pleased, and Super Joe's "brilliant" plan backfires.



Getting Rid Of Water/Flooding The World

Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire

Team Magma and Team Aqua swear they have humanity's best interests at heart, but we doubt their plans to cover the oceans of the world by triggering a massive volcanic eruption, or flooding the entire planet, would pan out the way they think they will.



Dime Store GLaDOS

Portal 2

Portal 2 is a game full of brilliant puzzles, but once Wheatley decides to make his own test chambers to kill Chell, they're either laughably broken or complete rip-offs of GLaDOS. It all makes sense when it's revealed he's actually programmed to be incompetent.



The Secret Apprentice

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Darth Vader is one of the coolest villains in cinematic history, but he didn't exactly make a cool move with his secret apprentice. Vader betrays Starkiller, then he tells him to start the Rebellion to take down the Empire, which Vader is pretty much the commander of.



Arm-y Of The Dead

Metal Gear Solid series

Somehow, a second plan involving a dead person's arm being surgically attached makes the list. After being possessed by Liquid Snake, the original owner of his new arm, it's revealed that Revolver Ocelot is just trying to fool an evil A.I. by hypnotizing himself.



Turning The City Against Himself

Infamous

Kessler, the antagonist of Infamous, is the alias used by a time-traveling version of protagonist Cole MacGrath. Rather than simply asking for help from himself, Kessler detonates a bomb and turns the entire population against Cole in a twisted way of trying to save the city. 💎

The Good



Eurogamer reports that Microsoft is resurrecting the **FABLE** franchise with a new title created by Forza Horizon developer Playground Games. The project is in its infancy, but multiple sources tell the site that it will be an open-world action/RPG title.

The Bad

Detroit: Become Human (shown) and Heavy Rain developer **QUANTIC DREAM** has been hit with allegations that the studio is a toxic workplace with sexual misconduct and sexist, racist, and homophobic incidents, according to reports from French publications Canard PC and Le Monde.

At the time of this writing, a French labor court is presiding over a complaint issued by a former employee that has also led to the departure of the entire IT department at Quantic Dream. One aspect of the allegations consists of 600 indecent photo-shopped images of company employees created by a veteran department head.

Quantic Dream founders David Cage and Guillaume de Fondaumièr have denied the allegations, saying they were unaware of the images. Witnesses say they were displayed in the open at the office and available on the local network.



TYLER BARRISS has been charged with involuntary manslaughter for an alleged swatting call in Wichita, Kansas that killed Andrew Finch. The incident was sparked after a reported feud between Call of Duty: WWII players that did not directly involve either Barriss or Finch. One of the players apparently got Barriss to call in a swatting against the other, who gave them a fake address that happened to be Finch's home. Finch was shot by a police officer when he answered the door.

The Ugly

g-b-u-
THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY

Quotable

"I can't speak anything to the specifics, but I can tell you there is movement in the works to get it done for the 25th year."



Original NBA Jam announcer Tim Kitzrow on the potential return of the franchise.

A COMEDY OF ~~ERRORS~~ SEQUELS

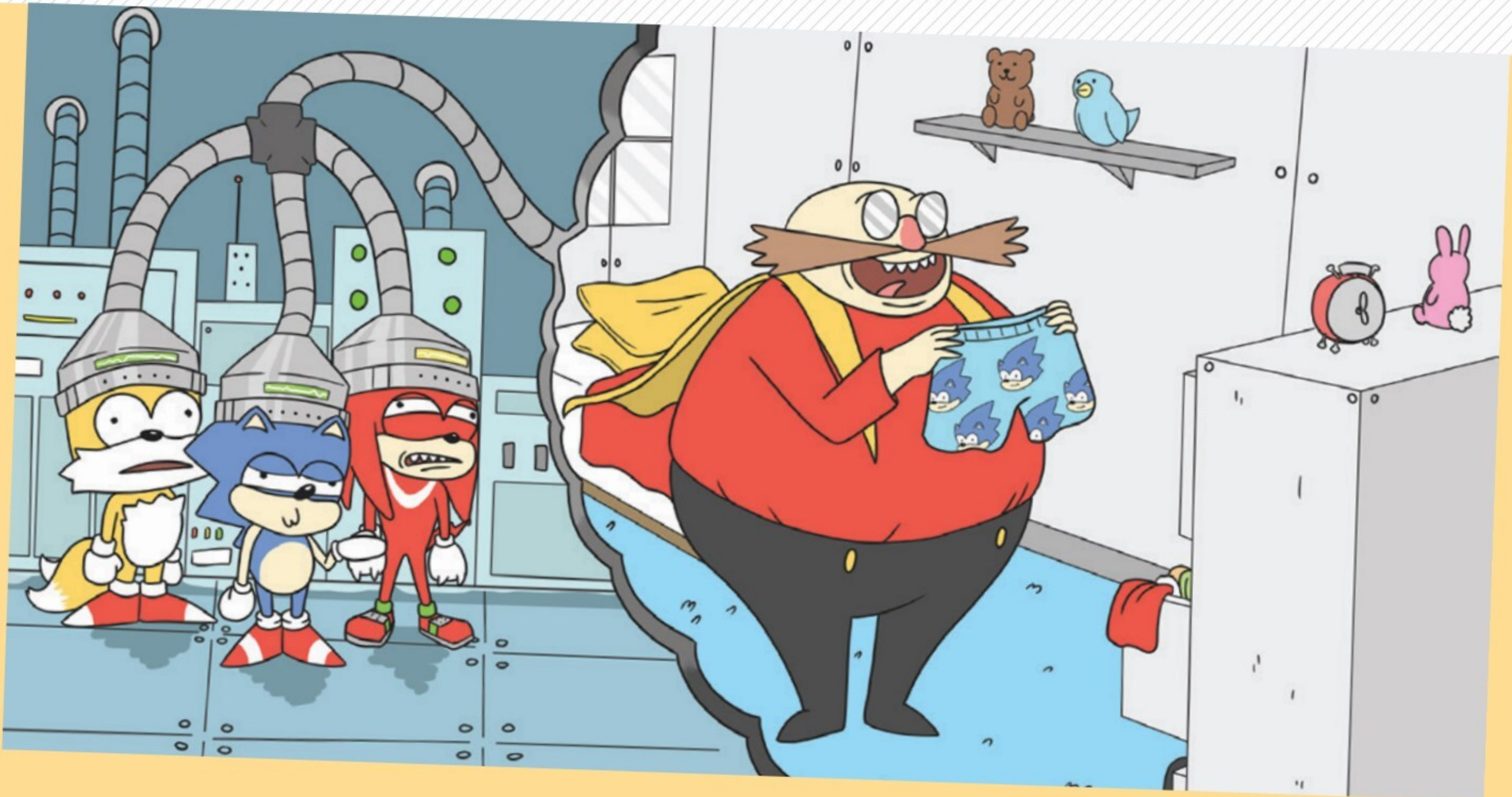
by Andrew Reiner with art by Jordan Bayes



Rick and Morty co-creator **Justin Roiland** and The Stanley Parable game designer **William Pugh** dream up sequels for some of gaming's biggest franchises

Justin Roiland is best known for his work on the animated television series *Rick and Morty*. Not only does he voice both titular characters, he is one of the show's writers. He also started the video game development studio Squanch Games, which is currently putting the finishing touches on the PlayStation VR game *Accounting+*. Also on board for development is *Crows Crows Crows*, a studio founded by William Pugh, a designer for the wildly popular indie game *The Stanley Parable*.

Since Roiland and Pugh seem to enjoy working with one another, we asked them what they would do if they were given the chance to develop sequels for some of the biggest series in gaming. Their pitches probably would end with them getting thrown out of the building by Nintendo or Capcom, but are unlike anything you would expect.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Justin Roiland: I'd really want to break open the story. Why does Dr. Robotnik do what he's doing? What is his issue? What is really going on there? As a villain, what makes him tick? I need to understand him more. That would be my goal as a writer. Let's dig down and get real with him. Why is he wanting to turn everything into robots? What happened in his childhood that caused this?

This would be seen through the eyes of Sonic, Tails, Knuckles and whoever the f--- else is hanging out with those losers. They are all together, and Sonic's like, "Aw s---, man. This motherf---er keeps turning every animal into robots. What the f--- is this guy's problem? I'm sick of this s---. We need to nip this in the bud."

William Pugh: They become like Psychonauts and go inside of Dr. Robotnik's head. You learn of all of the fetish s--- he's into. All of the Sonic s---. That's him.

R: Maybe Sonic gets the drop on him early in the game. For me, I always want to stay ahead of the audience. I never want them to know where we are heading. The twists and turns – they don't know when they are coming, and are like, "Where the f--- is this going to go?" I love the idea of Sonic, Knuckles, and Tails meeting a scientist – maybe

he's a new character – and he's like, "Listen, I know you've been having troubles with this guy. I know him a little bit. I don't know him that much, but I built this thing. If you want the drop on him, you got it."

So now you're in his head, and it's an *Avatar* situation where you are controlling Robotnik. You're going through his drawers and you're reading things and going, "Oh my god. This is nuts."

P: You have to get through his psychological issues. It's like *Her Story* but with Dr. Robotnik.

R: You are learning what is wrong with this guy. He's a f---ing mess. Maybe it's even from a selfless place, like Sonic and Knuckles are like, "This f---ing guy is sick and sad. Clearly this isn't healthy. Even more than just saving all of the bunnies he's encasing in robots, we need to save this guy, and help him out."

P: In a way, it's saving Dr. Robotnik.

R: That's the name: *Sonic the Hedgehog 7: Saving Dr. Robotnik*. We'd dive into the canon and be like, "Let's figure this s--- out."

RESIDENT EVIL

P: It would be a dating sim. The zombies are coming to get you, and you know you might die, so you've barricaded yourself in a house with 12 people.

R: And you need to make a baby with somebody, but it has to be on the up and up. It has to be consensual.

P: The spirit of love appears in a cloud of smoke at the beginning, and he's voiced by Justin. He's like, "Hey, you gotta get with someone before the zombies get you."

R: You need to make love happen and quick!

P: It's like *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* where you have just 24 hours to do this.

R: If you don't do it in time, it resets. I love *Majora's Mask* and *Dead Rising*, where there's progress that's maintained, but it resets, kind of like *Groundhog's Day*. I wish more games did that. So it would be that formula, but you

would gain knowledge of people in the house. You could play as a boy or girl, so gender neutral. You still have to kill zombies to buy yourself more time.

P: But you have to kill them sexily.

R: That's right. Doing that creates hearts that go above the heads of the opposite sex. By the way, we're going to be really progressive, and let you choose if you are straight, gay, or if you want to f--- a zombie. You can do that too, but it's harder. That's the hard mode. If they bite you, that's trouble. When you first boot the game up, the love cloud is like, "Hey, are you gay?" That's the first question. And then it might be like, "Oh, you're not. Are you a boy or a girl?" You figure all of that s--- out, and then the cloud says "You have a lot of work ahead of you. In 24 hours the zombies are coming. They are going to break the [doors] on the house down, and kill everyone. You have to find love before that, but I got good news: Everything resets after the zombies break in."



ns/Rifles

INTIMACY

BULLETS

BATHROOM

SANDWICH

Should you become... closer?

YES!

NO...

6 hrs.
left





GOD OF WAR

R: I think the war would be done, and [Kratos] would be like, "I'm the god of war, and there's nothing to fight right now."

P: So he would take up gardening.

R: And home decorating. There's nothing to fight, but he's still angry. He will punch holes in walls and stuff like that. As you control him, if you get too close to the wall and his rage meter is high – boom – hole in the wall. He's a packrat, so his house is full of s---, and he knows he has to clean it up. It needs to be organized into three piles: donate, sell, give it up. The mess consists of heads of people he's killed and stuff like that. It's a little bit like the show *Hoarding: Buried Alive*.

Maybe the hoarder people are coming, and they are the ones you have to deal with. Not giant monsters, Cyclops, and s---. People are saying, "You need throw this stuff away!" He's been reported by the city. They are going to demolish his house. He has 90 days to sort this out.

P: For safety violations. So it's like Pikmin. It begins on day one in the God of War's house and there's s--- everywhere. You gotta figure out how to clean it in that time.

SUPER MARIO BROS.

P: First of all, Mario and Luigi are both voiced by you, Justin.

R: That's the only thing we could possibly add to Mario. Let's give them voices and story. Everything else is perfect. But enough of the Princess getting kidnapped. We've done that a thousand times. Let's go somewhere else.

P: No, it starts that way, with the Princess getting kidnapped. Everything we show in the trailers and press makes it look like another traditional Mario game, but then you play it, and at the end of the first level we kill Bowser.

R: What I loved about Mario RPG is Bowser ended up joining you. They actually subverted some s---. Nintendo's done f---ing everything, and the new Mario game is so f---ing good.

P: How do you out-weird Nintendo? I mean, Mario is a human and there are other humans.

R: Wait... What is he? We don't know any more. I guess officially he's a tiny person...a little person. Is that politically correct?

P: But he doesn't even look the same.

R: He's a f---ing alien! He's from another reality. I love that New Donk City is just there. It isn't another reality. It's just on the map. It's like, "Oh. This is all one planet. Whatever." So yes, our game would just have a stronger narrative, more comedy, and all of the great Mario gameplay.

P: But with the art style of the old Super Mario cartoon. Up the f---ed-upness by about 500 percent. ☹





SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

Mustachioed dinosaurs. Mountains made of food. New York City. Super Mario Odyssey strikes a balance between normal and weird, but it may not be as carefully planned as you think. Producer Yoshiaki Koizumi and director Shinya Takahashi walk us through the development process, and how some of the biggest breakthroughs were a product of small development teams experimenting independently.

by [Andrew Reiner](#)

Was Super Mario Odyssey ever in development for Wii U, or was it exclusively designed for Switch?

Koizumi: It was always planned for Nintendo Switch. We really were considering a lot of the hardware capabilities specifically for this game, and wanted to make the most use of them.

Takahashi: I think the idea of what the Nintendo Switch is became very important around here, because it can both function as a console or portable device. We really thought about what sort of software features would make the best use of those capabilities. Super Mario Odyssey really answers to a lot of that capability in the way we had hoped. We wanted to time it for year-end release to make the most of that as well.

When you began working on Super Mario Odyssey, at what point in development did you know Mario's hat would be the central focus?

K: When we first started talking about the planning for this game, we knew we wanted to do something different. We asked the team to freely suggest ideas for gameplay, and then prototype them. One of these groups came up with the idea of throwing the hat as a fun action. Another group, separately, came up with the idea of taking over an enemy or object. As we were playing these prototypes, we realized they could go together to form one particular idea.

Did you do a similar challenge with your team when designing the worlds? New Donk City is so

distinct and wildly different than every other land Mario visits. If that's the case, did you unify the ideas into one game?

K: Yes, that's true. The way we approached it was not necessarily thinking about what country we would want to create, but what kind of gameplay we would like to make possible, what sort of space was needed to accomplish these kinds of gameplay experiences, and then trying to collect those together visually to see what they would represent as a real-world location. So it's not like we started out this game saying to ourselves, "You know, we've always wanted to have Mario run around an environment that looks exactly like New York City."

Was Bowser one of the firsts transformations you started working on?

K: It wasn't necessarily from the start, but as people started playing early versions of the game, they started asking questions like, "Surely, you'd be able to play Bowser at some point, right?"

What transformations do you think were the most successful?

K: I think the lava bubble is my favorite. This is something that wasn't personified that much as a character in previous games. Mario normally takes damage when he touches lava. In this case, when he captures the lava bubble, it suddenly flips to create new spaces in the level he can access, and really turns things around as an experience in that area. This is a small character that represented a big discovery in terms of gameplay.

At the beginning of the game, Mario's hat is shredded, he plummets a great distance, and wakes up in a black-and-white world not unlike *Nightmare Before Christmas*. Ghostly beings surround him. This may be a stretch, but did Mario die in this moment? Is he in the afterlife?

K: We weren't thinking quite that deeply about the story. (laughs) Our reason was this: Most of the time Mario explores worlds with blue skies above him and green grasses below. It's meant to feel really good. We wanted to do something that was simple, surprising, and in contrast to those blue skies and green grasses. If you find yourself in a black-and-white world like this, we thought it would be an engaging surprise for the player.

Now that you mention it, though, the fact that Cappy is white, has kind of a wispy, ghost-like tail – perhaps there's something to what you said. (laughs) Sometimes it's hard to think about the character being a ghost. I think a lot of people stop thinking about Casper being a ghost, and only see him as a fun character. The decision to make [Cappy] a ghost here is more based on the design of the black-and-white world. It made sense to make him white and ghost-like. That seemed to match well.

In addition to the free update, are you working on downloadable content? Perhaps more Moons to collect?

K: There's a lot of volume [in Super Mario Odyssey]. That was a big focus in development: Give the player tons to do. We pushed ourselves to create as much as we could. I can't announce anything specifically today, but of course, if there was a really cool idea for us to do, then we would certainly be thinking about DLC.

An interesting idea is exploring Mario being dead.

K: (laughs) That's pretty good! 💎

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

Now that the final piece of downloadable content for Breath of the Wild is available, we sat down with director Hidemaro Fujibayashi and producer Eiji Aonuma to discuss designing the Divine Beasts and the challenges of developing the first open-world Zelda title.

by Andrew Reiner

You took a number of risks in redefining the Zelda experience in Breath of the Wild. Were there some concerns internally about pushing too far outside of the established series formula?

Fujibayashi: The way we've always made Zelda games, every part of the game was kind of a custom scenario or event, something created linearly. When you make that, you have this risk of making too much content for this particular game and have to cut some out, or get to the end of development and realize you don't have enough. With this game, we wanted to make this big open world in which lots of things could happen. When you do that, you don't have enough time to make it all customized. It can't all be scripted and preplanned things.

The Divine Beasts are a new take on traditional Zelda dungeons. How did the idea of these large beasts come to be?

F: The way design works for us, we have to figure out what the game world needs, and then we talk to the artist. A big part of this game is you have this big, open space. What we wanted was something you could see from a long way off, something that was moving around, and would act as a landmark, yet is also kind of exciting, and almost romantic in a sense. They fit that idea

of there always being something new to explore and discover – you see them, get on them, and go inside them and realize they hold dungeons.

When we had the idea of what we wanted them to be, and how players would interact with them, we go to the artist and say, "Considering how the world is set up, what should these things actually be?" It made sense for the one in the Rito area to be a bird. We wanted one up on the mountain and said, "what could be crawling along that?" We had a bit of trouble with this one, but eventually ended up with the salamander/lizard style. For us, if you say "desert," we think "camel," but we also wanted some Gerudo elements in there, so we added lightning. The water was also kind of tricky, but we ended up going with the elephant since they do a lot in water, like suck it up in their trunks and spray it everywhere. Those were the ideas for the territories. When you combined them with the story idea we had of being from 10,000 years ago, and there being runes, we brought that to the artist, and they came back with were the ideas for the Divine Beasts.

As a former director of Zelda games, was there any advice you gave to Mr. Fujibayashi at the beginning of making this game?

Aonuma: From day one, not really. Everything was new. When Mr. Fujibayashi would come to me and show me things, we both kind of said, "I don't know. Is this what we should do?" We were both kind of in this together. Towards the latter half, when the game started to come together, everything just seemed to make sense.

Where exactly does Breath of the Wild take place in the Zelda timeline?

A: We want to leave that to your imagination. (laughs)

Did you ever think about adding in something like the Song of Storms to control the weather?

F: Initially we did consider giving player control of the weather, but realized not being able to control it is much more fun. Controlling it wasn't really fitting this game. In Ocarina of Time, you were in places that were just sunny or raining. That was the way the players were able to control that. Adding in the weather control would have increased the number of variables in the world. It was more interesting to have Link against nature, not controlling it. That ended up being more natural and fun.

You added a motorcycle to the game. Was there any content left on the cutting-room floor? Any ideas not make the cut?

F: Not currently. Certainly there are plenty of ideas that don't make it in the idea phase. In terms of things we actually wanted to put in, we feel everything is there. 



Leaving Internet Freedom Behind

What abolishing net neutrality means for the games industry



Last December, the internet quickly fell into panic. Scrolling through social media or reading the latest news left you bombarded with apocalyptic outcries proclaiming the end of the internet as we know it. Despite the rampant alarmism, this commotion surrounded a real threat: how the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) vote to repeal Obama-era net-neutrality protections could change the way we browse the web or even play games.

We reached out to several game developers, online business owners, and non-profit organizers fighting for net neutrality. They laid out what a net neutrality-less internet could look like through the lens of the gaming industry, and why it's important to fight back.

by Elise Favis

What Is Net Neutrality?

You may be wondering: What exactly is net neutrality, and why is it important? While this repeal doesn't necessarily result in the death of the internet, it does leave behind protections that keep the net as transformative as it has been over the past few decades. Net neutrality provides a democratic web to all, and many argue it's essential to gamers and the growth of the video game industry too.

Net-neutrality rules prohibit internet service providers (ISPs) from manipulating or discriminating against online content. It keeps the internet on an equal footing, where ISPs cannot give preferential treatment to certain websites over others. Every piece of online information has the potential to reach thousands, if not millions, of users along the exact same data pipeline. With the FCC's vote to repeal net neutrality, this freedom to find your own audience and succeed is subject to change, as the reins are handed over to ISPs like AT&T, Comcast, and Verizon.

ISPs now have the clearance to throttle or block content they deem less desirable. They could potentially create premium fast lanes for websites

that pay more for bandwidth and slow down traffic for those that don't, leaving smaller startups and online communities struggling to compete with larger corporations. If an ISP like Comcast decided to create its own video game distribution platform to compete with the likes of Steam, it could force Valve to pay higher premiums or face inferior service.

Despite strong public opposition, the Republican majority currently in control of the FCC believes abolishing net neutrality has many benefits. From their point of view, less regulation means charging more money, and in return being able to reinvest those finances into better internet infrastructure for rural areas. This approach, however, has drawn criticism. The FCC has laid out plans to reclassify mobile phone service as broadband service, which would give the impression that rural areas have better access when in reality they do not.

If you don't like how a provider operates, ISPs argue you can switch to another. Unfortunately, most consumers have only one or two internet providers in their area that provide adequate broadband speeds.

As a result, most web users are wary

about handing these corporations more control over what consumers see online.

The Video Game Industry Responds

As video games become increasingly reliant on the internet, this repeal could create drastic changes. It's possible that ISPs could introduce "gamer packages," to increase your download speeds on partnered digital storefronts as long as you shell out enough cash, leaving other stores' download speeds throttled in comparison. Stricter data caps are another possibility, which could make downloading large digital games less feasible.

Scenarios like these are possible realities without net-neutrality protections in place. With that in mind, both tech and video game communities have come forward as strong supporters of net neutrality.

Many big web-based companies from around the world quickly announced their opposition to the FCC vote, including Google, Netflix, and Amazon. Twitch also released a statement, with CEO Emmett Shear expressing that net neutrality has played an "important role" in the livestreaming service's history and success.





Without net neutrality, ISPs can stifle internet connections, which could impede your broadband speeds or affect gaming servers for multiplayer titles like Overwatch

The Entertainment Software Association (ESA), prominently known as the organizers of the annual E3 convention, has long been a supporter of net neutrality. In 2015, the association praised the FCC's improved protections. In a recent statement provided to *Game Informer*, the ESA expressed that it is "disappointed" with the FCC's recent decision.

Video game streamers and YouTube personalities are especially concerned about the ramifications the repeal brings to their work. Omeed Dariani is the founder and CEO of Online Performers Group, a company that represents online streaming talent. He sees the repeal as an "existential threat" to his clients' businesses.

Dariani's clients range from big-name successes like Angry Joe to smaller streaming productions that rely on regular content creation to make ends meet. He believes these smaller

streamers would be hit the hardest, and could disappear completely if their advertising revenue isn't high enough.

"Most of these guys aren't making millions of dollars," he says. "We could be going down a path where streamers and YouTube content creators, who are really an innovative part of democratizing the gaming industry right now, could just go away."

Wildly successful programs like Kinda Funny, an online entertainment company that streams on both YouTube and Twitch, are less concerned about being unable to make ends meet, and more concerned about their audience.

Co-founder Greg Miller sees the internet as the "American Dream," which allowed him and three friends to quit their jobs at *IGN* in 2015 to start their own full-time entertainment venture.

He describes his audience as "best friends," who watch Kinda Funny's shows and listen to its podcasts as their daily ritual. "I'd hate for that to be cut off because this thing that used to be free, YouTube and podcasts and Twitch, are suddenly out of reach [for our fans]," he says. "That's heartbreaking for us."

Fewer viewers means less advertising revenue. While Kinda Funny may not be hit as hard as smaller streamers if fees go up, Miller nonetheless describes the idea of losing coworkers because of financial strains as a "nightmare."

A Concerning Future For Indie Developers

While abolishing net neutrality affects all web users, it especially leaves smaller businesses more vulnerable and could impede their ability to compete with large corporations.

With the last decade's indie boom, several self-publishing services have become available, through platforms like Steam and Itch.io. These offer developers affordable ways to distribute games online without the additional costs that physical releases incur.

Teddy Dief, a developer of the indie hit *Hyper Light Drifter* and former creative director at Square Enix Montreal, says he's most worried about fee hikes being introduced to distribution options.

"Digital stores use a ton of bandwidth to send games and updates to players. They're the ones at massive scale who get hit first, and that damage will trickle down [to developers]," he says.

As someone who has worked in both indie and triple-A, Dief believes that small indie teams with restrictive budgets would suffer the most. Even today, indie developers have to make sacrifices to see their dream games come to life. For example, Studio MDHR co-creators Chad and Jared Moldenhauer remortgaged their home to make *Cuphead* possible. Without net neutrality, bigger fees for distribution could mean more sacrifices like these or could halt production completely.

"The whole story here from top to bottom is that net neutrality protects the little guy," Dief says. "Publicly traded companies aren't the little guy. Their costs could go up and their margins would go down, but two-person indie teams burning their own personal savings are the ones who can be forced to quit entirely if costs go up."

Zachary Johnson, an indie developer working on a co-op party game called *Joggernauts*, also shows concern for the future of independent game

Opposing Views

It's clear that public opposition to the FCC's repeal is incredibly strong. Prior to the repeal, a survey by the University of Maryland concluded that 83 percent of Americans disapprove of the FCC's plans, while only 16 percent approve.

However, some outliers exist. This includes Jonathan Spalter, the president and CEO of USTelecom, who wrote a post on the *Daily Caller* explaining how he believes gutting net neutrality is beneficial for consumers. He believes the FCC is "making way for a new sheriff" by policing the internet, and that ISPs won't dare to block or throttle content as they have previously promised not to. If they undercut those vows, he says, it would result in a public-relations nightmare.

Some Republicans have also spoken out publicly to praise the FCC's repeal, such as Rep. Tom Graves of Georgia. He tweeted that net neutrality "stifled innovation" and did nothing to protect consumers. He believes the repeal will be beneficial for bringing better internet access to rural areas.

development. Johnson's been making games since the mid '90s and has long been reliant on the web to bring his projects to fruition.

Similar to Dief, he worries about how secondary fees from ISPs could impact his work, because these endeavors are already costly. "As someone who makes content for the web, hosts websites, and works on projects, I'm already paying on both ends," he says.

Although Johnson's team is all local, he says that telecommuting is nonetheless essential to his work. With the loss of net neutrality, sharing large files with one another when collaborating may no longer be possible with the introduction of expensive cap thresholds.

"We work from home every few days a week and share giant files over Dropbox or Slack," he says. "And those certainly could be discriminated against."

The Fight To Conserve Net Neutrality

Lawmakers, attorneys, and advocacy groups around the country are facing a difficult battle to try to overturn the FCC's repeal.

To protect net-neutrality rules, pressure is being put on Congress, who can nullify the repeal with the Congressional Review Act (CRA). Once the FCC rules enter the federal register, Congress has 60 legislative days to vote on a reversal of that decision. Passing the CRA requires a simple majority in the Senate. This simple majority prevents leadership from blocking it and allows the vote to be forced to the floor.

With 50 senators endorsing a legislative measure to overturn the FCC's repeal at the time this article went to press, the Senate requires only one more Republican member's support to move the fight to the House. This is

promising, but the House will require even more Republican support, and it's likely the President will veto the bill. Overturning the repeal is a tall order, as it requires winning over several Republicans and being signed into law by the President, but it's not impossible, according to Fight for the Future's campaign director Evan Greer.

Fight for the Future is a non-profit advocacy group behind the largest online protests to date. This summer, their internet-wide "Day of Action" saw the support of thousands of tech companies, protesting to protect net neutrality.

Greer, who sees net neutrality as the internet's "first amendment," believes that her organization can succeed in putting pressure on Congress by giving the public accessible tools to make a difference and by educating them about the cause. Fight for the Future's campaign website, www.battleforthenet.com, gives an overview of the situation, easy to read facts, and a quick way to contact Congress immediately.

"You could only win substantively on these issues by really educating people in a meaningful and deep way so that they can be on the lookout for misinformation," she says.

With net neutrality becoming one of this year's big talking points, several lawmakers are publicly stating their opposition to the FCC vote. Governor Jay Inslee, for example, plans to preserve net neutrality for Washington state consumers through the means of legislation. More than 20 attorney generals are now suing the FCC, following an investigation that found over two million illegitimate anti-net neutrality comments were sent to the commission.

Greer says the most clear-cut way to stop the FCC's repeal is through Congress, and is wary of state lawmakers

What You Can Do

If you're a gamer, or even just a user of the internet, this repeal affects you. Here's what you can do to help make a difference if you are against the FCC reversal.

- Stay informed. An easy way to stay up-to-date with the latest developments is to sign up for mailing lists of advocacy groups fighting for net neutrality. This includes Fight for the Future, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Center for Media Justice, and the ACLU.
- Make your voice heard. Call your senators, state attorney generals, and members of congress to let them know that you are against the FCC's repeal.
- Spread the word. The best way to spread the word is to educate others about the issue, or provide resources that do. If you own a website, write a blog, or are vocal on social media, www.battleforthenet.com has several banners, GIFs, and more that you can use to help advocate the importance of net neutrality.
- Donate. Organizations like Fight for the Future are small, and depend on outside support to stay afloat. Donating to their cause, or others like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, can help make a difference.

who use net neutrality as part of their campaign platform as we near midterm elections. "Watered-down legislation could end up undermining our ability to enforce net neutrality for the future, which is exactly what ISPs are intending to do," she says.

With such stark opposition, including both lawmakers and political figures taking a stand to preserve net neutrality, Greer is hopeful that this is a winnable fight. As an issue that affects every web user, individuals from all corners of the web are making their voices heard.

"It may be a bit of a long road," Greer says. "But I fundamentally believe that the power of the internet will overcome the power of lobbyists from these corporations and that we will secure net-neutrality protections for generations to come." ♦





Crafting Characters

How a lifelong Nintendo fan used her artistic talents to fulfill a dream

When Krystyne Escalambre was 18 years old, she sent Nintendo samples of her custom jewelry to try to get a job at her favorite game company. While she eventually received a kindly worded rejection letter, she didn't give up hope. Fast forward several years and Escalambre, now known as GandaKris, is a prominent custom Amiibo artist. After attending E3 2017, she formed a partnership with Nintendo as a brand ambassador, fulfilling a longtime dream.

Name:
Krystyne Escalambre

Location:
Las Vegas, NV

Twitter:
@MissGandaKris

Instagram:
MissGandaKris

YouTube:
GandaKris

interview by Brian Shea

How did you get interested in being an artist and making custom Amiibos?

It all started in high school. I was super quiet back then, so I didn't have too many friends. I had my sisters there, so my sisters' friends were my friends technically. They dragged me to the video game club and I played Super Smash Bros. Melee with a lot of my now-friends. It was cool because I met a ton of people with the same interests as me. I built my first friendships there, so it was awesome.

At the same time, I was taking art, too. How I got started in art is Pokémon, basically. Back then, they didn't have the cool figurines that they have now for Pokémon, so I had to draw out the figurines and cut them

out of paper. My sisters would play with them, so every time they'd get into a battle, a limb would rip off and then I'd have to redraw it. That's how I got a lot of my practice.

It was easy for me to transition between the two, so I combined art and video games. I made my first Kirby figurine, which looked terrible [laughs]. That's how I got started – all in high school!

So Amiibos were a pretty natural transition for you.

Oh yeah. In fact, it's funny because I like to say I kind of made the first Amiibo, because I made a figure of Kirby using his Super Smash Bros. special when he cooks everyone in a pot. But I actually had made a Super Smash Bros. base to go

along with it, so it stood up. It looked like an Amiibo, but it didn't scan or anything, obviously.

What was your reaction when Nintendo announced Amiibos?

At first, honestly, I was on the fence. I had no idea what people's reaction was going to be. I didn't know if I should collect them all; I knew I was going to get Pikachu and certain characters that I love. When it blew up, it was just amazing to me. It was amazing to see how dedicated people were and how passionate they were when it came to trying to collect all of them. The first Amiibo I owned wasn't even one that I bought; it was one that was given to me: Pikachu. My friend gave it to me because he knew I played Pikachu [in Super Smash Bros.].

What was your first custom Amiibo and what was your inspiration behind it?

My first custom was that Pikachu that was given to me. I had made it into a PikaFlash – Pikachu crossed over with The Flash from DC Comics. It looked terrible by my standards. [laughs] I kept it just because it was the first Pikachu I was ever given, but the detail was not up to my expectations that I have now.

At what point did you realize this was something you wanted to devote yourself to?

When everyone started liking my pictures on Instagram, that's when I realized that I was on the right path to making something great that people would love and appreciate. The moment people really did cherish my work, I figured, "I could do this for a while!" It was just awesome to see everyone's feedback. Being thrown in the limelight sometimes when you don't expect people to react the way they do or expect that many people to acknowledge your work is scary because I don't like to put myself out there. But everyone's comments and feedback make it worth it because most of it is really nice. I love constructive feedback, don't get me wrong, but of course you're going to get those random haters once in a while. But the good people I've met through this journey definitely make up for it and I appreciate everyone who supports my work as an artist. I can't thank them enough.

You've done so many imaginative concepts, even going as far as the Super Mario Cereal box. Where do you get your ideas?

It's funny because people think I have this amazing process of coming up with Amiibos, but I don't. It's really from people suggesting me ideas. Most of the time, I do have to come up with it, and it's on a whim. Usually when I know an Amiibo is going to come out, I start thinking, "What can I make with that Amiibo?" Other than that, all the crossovers that I've done come from my fan base and some friends.

Do you prefer to make modified versions of existing Amiibos or make figures from scratch?

I love working with a base; I think it's so much easier. I could make things from scratch, but that's the reason why I loved Amiibos when they came out; it's so much easier to make things that I wanted without having to start over completely. That's why I lean toward Amiibos. It really takes out 50 percent of the work and I can just concentrate on adding the details that I want and trying to make sure

that it looks exactly the way I want it to.

Do you have a favorite custom Amiibo that you've made?

My favorite one that I like to work on is Armored Mewtwo, and that's just because it's a childhood memory of my sisters and I; we would walk to the movie theater and we saw all the Pokémon movies and got all the cards. That was really fun for me to make because I really try to go all-out on the details and make it as unique as possible. When it comes to making any of these Amiibos, I want to make sure I add a lot of detail so that it's not just an Amiibo; it's like a figurine that anybody can display in their home proudly. That's why I really like making Armored Mewtwo.

The one that I hold near and dear to my heart is [former Nintendo President and CEO Satoru] Iwata. I will never, ever sell that one. I only donate that one or give it away to my supporters. When I do donate it, it's usually to St. Jude's or another charity that I'm familiar with. That really signifies why I'm doing what I'm doing. I want to make an impact the way he has. It would truly be an honor to have touched as many lives as I could before I go and leave this earth. It was something that meant a lot to not only me, but to a lot of people because it did affect a whole community. It's really nice to give back with my art and give a tribute to Iwata.

What perks do you get from being a brand ambassador for Nintendo?

I can't talk about them all, but sometimes they'll send me products before release for review. They'll give me passes when it comes to E3 so I can try out the new games without having to wait in those really long lines. They actually flew me out and we did an episode on Nintendo Minute, which was a huge honor to be surrounded by [hosts] Kit [Ellis] and Krysta [Yang]. I love them both! They're just such hilarious hosts. They filmed an episode of me trying to teach them to make custom Amiibos. Krysta was amazing! She was so good. Kit ... he's good. We can get him to a better level, though [laughs]. It was awesome!

If someone wants to get their hands on one of your custom Amiibos, how do they do that?

I have a channel on YouTube where I teach people how to customize or do nerdy DIYs. I give a lot of my work away on Instagram and Twitter. Right now, I don't have commissions open because I'm trying to finish everything I need to get done for other people. If they subscribe, I give away all my art and all they have to do is comment and share the video and all that stuff. 💜





photo: Ness Sherry

Sliding Between Worlds

Most video games fall into one of two camps: big-budget triple-A or homebrew indie projects. For years, Ninja Theory chief creative director **Tameem Antoniades** has been arguing for the value of the middle space between the two. Last fall, Ninja Theory tested that thesis with *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, which quickly became a financial success. We sat down to chat with Antoniades about his experience carving out a new path for the industry.

With projects like *Heavenly Sword* and *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*, you seemed to pick up on the importance of motion capture and facial animation even before studios like Naughty Dog. Why did that technology seem so important at the time?

At the time, production values were going up, so we thought we needed to

leap a generation and do something really ambitious. Around the same time, *Lord of the Rings* came out and I saw a behind-the-scenes feature with Andy Serkis about how they created Golem, and I thought, "That's what we need. That's next generation." It just so happened that my brother, who is a mortgage advisor, was doing Andy's mortgage, so

I asked my brother if he could show him the trailer of *Heavenly Sword*. Andy called me, and I said, "Look, I don't know how to do any of this stuff, writing, acting, directing. Can you help us out and be in our game?" He just said, "yeah." He introduced us to Weta. He helped with the writing and acting. And, he starred in it. He was happy to be involved.

You've also had a good relationship with writer/director Alex Garland (28 Days Later, Dredd, and Ex Machina) who worked on Enslaved with you. How have your relationships with people in the film industry influenced your work in games?

Andy taught me everything I know about working a set and working with a cast. With Alex on Enslaved, he taught me a lot about writing. He's like a headmaster. He's very stern and serious. He doesn't hold back. If you do something wrong, he'll tell you off. If you get an apostrophe wrong, he'll tell you off. And if you keep doing it, he gets quite mad. But, if he thinks something is great, he'll say, "That's great." He's much more than a writer. He understood that telling a story requires arts, audio, and performances, which is why he's now a director. I think I learned how to direct from him.

You care a lot about storytelling in games, but a lot of people criticize video game storytelling because players' actions are often disconnected from the dramatic beats of a story. How much do you think about that when working on a game?

In my mind, there's never been a conflict between storytelling and games. There is definitely a disconnect between, "Oh, it's story time, now it's gameplay time, now it's story time," but a lot of times that's because the developers aren't thinking about the story while they're making the game. On Heavenly Sword, for example, I didn't appreciate how much storytelling I could do within the gameplay. In Hellblade, we tried to move away from that concept of, "Now it's cutscene time!" because there are no camera cuts in the game. It feels more seamless. Another thing I've learned is that a lot of people think that telling a story in games is all about interaction. That's why you end up with games with multiple choices and branching storylines. There are no branching storylines in Hellblade, and there's very little in terms of choices. I think it's more of the participation that matters than the multiple endings or the interactive storylines. It's the idea that you feel like you're a part of the journey, and you're willing to be taken along. That's a powerful force.

Early on, Ninja Theory built a reputation for designing good combat. Is that why Capcom approached you about Devil May Cry?

I'm going to tell you a story that I haven't shared before, because I think it's been long enough, and I think it colored us as a studio quite badly. When we finished Heavenly Sword, we

wanted to work on a new game, but we couldn't because under our agreements with Sony it would immediately be owned by Sony. They wanted us to work on a sequel. They also wanted us to scale down from 110 people to about 20 or 25. Basically, they wanted to fire most of us. They wanted us to go back to the concept phase, and we couldn't work on anything else. We said, "No." Then they said, "Well, we're going to work on this game whether you say yes or no, and we own your technology. Are you sure?" We said, "We're not going to fire all these people that stood by us," so we split from Sony.

That's why you teamed up with Namco for Enslaved and Capcom for DMC?

Midway through the development of Enslaved, Capcom approached us to do Devil May Cry. They liked Heavenly Sword, and they wanted a total reinterpretation of DMC. I sort of half had my eye on that project, because I was deep in production on Enslaved, so we spun up another team with a different director to work on Devil May Cry. But, that game went a little bit off the rails, well actually, maybe "a little" is putting it lightly. I didn't intend to be the creative director on that project, but I had to take it over, and I spent from there until the end of the project just firefighting, trying to get it back to what Devil May Cry was about.

You have been very open with your development during Hellblade. Did you hope to teach the public about the struggles of game design?

Sort of, but I also think in this digital age where everything costs virtually nothing, and everything feels intangible, the only feeling that we get that something is worth anything is when we see the craft that goes into it. People buy Ferraris or expensive watches because they know people are hand-making that stuff. If we see a sword being forged online, and you see how they make it, and how they fold the metal hundreds of times, and the workmanship that goes into it, you're more willing to pay for that sword because it means something. You saw the guy making it. You saw the value that was put into it. In game development, we're not selling soap and Coca-Cola, we're selling worlds, dreams, and stories. We're selling the craftsmanship that goes into those things. That's why we tried to be transparent with our development process on Hellblade.

Now that Hellblade has proven to be a financial success, do you think

that success is repeatable?

Hellblade has done really well. We made our money back, and we're well into profit. But we didn't know if we would make our money back. There was a very high chance that we'd sink. And that's quite amazing, because rarely does a plan work in game development.

I strongly feel that we can repeat it, and that other studios can repeat it, but there are several important pieces to this formula. One is the price. It has to undercut what is out there. It has to offer something at a better price, and you can only offer that price when you don't have the overheads of big game development. You also need a social campaign. Our dev diaries were our campaign. We regularly had about 75,000 people watching our dev diaries, and those were the people who pre-ordered the game and gave us the money to market Hellblade. The final thing is that the game itself has to be unique and offer something that no one else is offering. If we just did another mini-DMC or another mini-Heavenly Sword, we'd just be offering something less than what is already out there. You have to take creative risks, and it's only when all those things line up that our model works.

Do you think Ninja Theory will keep working on big budget triple-A games, or will you make more games in the Hellblade model?

Personally, I want to work on more stuff like Hellblade. I want to continue to build and take risks, because it's supremely exciting. I don't think I can go back. However, Hellblade's development team was, on average, about 20 people, and there's 100 people in this studio. The reason we had cash to start Hellblade was because we were doing work for hire on games like Disney Infinity. So, I think, part of the studio will always be working with other publishers on games that fit our skill set. Hellblade has really changed my outlook on the power of what a game can be. There are so many things you have to do while making a game, so many preconceptions from publishers, from the public, from your team members. There are so many forces that try to mold a game into a formula, and it's really hard to break out of that. I think the reason Hellblade was a success was because it was, generally speaking, my last gasp. I said, "Okay, I'll do this one game the way I think it should be, without anyone interfering with it." It really felt like this would be my last game. Unfortunately, it's been such a success that I probably have to stick it out and keep making games.

Unfortunately?

Yeah, because it's so f-----g painful to make a game. 💎

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1995

Tameem Antoniades graduates from Queen Mary University of London with a degree in computer sciences. In his free time, he programs Amiga games for fun

1996

After getting a job at Millennium Interactive Ltd., Antoniades gets his first taste of professional programming on games like Beast Wars: Transformers for the PlayStation

2000

Looking for more creative control, Antoniades teams up with colleagues Mike Ball and Nina Kristensen, and the three form an independent studio called Just Add Monsters. In October they are acquired by Argonaut Games

2003

Just Add Monsters releases its first game, a four-player fighting game for the original Xbox called Kung Fu Chaos

2004

Argonaut Games faces liquidation, so Antoniades and his co-founders scramble together enough money and buy back their company. The studio rebrands under the name Ninja Theory

2007

Working with Sony, Ninja Theory releases the visually impressive hack-and-slash Heavenly Sword early in the PS3 lifecycle

2010

Antoniades directs Enslaved: Odyssey to the West, a post-apocalyptic reimaging of the classic Chinese myth Journey to the West

2013

Ninja Theory releases DmC: Devil May Cry after Capcom approached the studio, looking for a new take on the iconic action series

2017

Antoniades leads a small team within Ninja Theory to release the self-funded Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice. Within three months the game turns a profit

HOT TECH ON THE HORIZON

The best of CES 2018

by Matt Miller

1 Digital Storm Spark

Most boutique PCs look like oversized, black monoliths, but Digital Storm's newest gaming machine is about the size of a shoebox. Built around Intel's Z370 chipset with an Nvidia GTX 1080 GPU and an Intel Core-i7 8700K processor, the Spark stays cool thanks to a custom hardline liquid-cooling system. Thankfully, Digital Storm says that the entire system is fully upgradable. The Spark is scheduled to be released in spring.

Starting at \$1,299 | digitalstorm.com

1



2 Razer Project Linda

Smartphones are so powerful these days that they rival the cutting-edge laptops from only a few years ago. With this in mind, Razer has rolled out a concept laptop that would essentially function as a dock for the company's recently launched Razer Phone. Not only would Razer's phone power the laptop, but it would double as a touchpad. Razer doesn't always bring its CES experiments to market, but we'd like to see this idea explored further.

TBA | razerzone.com



2

3 HTC Vive Pro

HTC didn't announce a price or release date for its second-generation VR headset, but the new unit features some exciting quality-of-life advances. The Vive Pro has a more ergonomic design, includes integrated headphones, and the system's new 2,888x1,600 AMOLED display is 78-percent sharper than the original Vive. Meanwhile, Valve's new lighthouse trackers allow you to pair up to four trackers together to create larger play spaces. Now we just need some VR games worth playing.

TBA | vive.com

3





4

4 Nvidia Big Format Gaming Displays

Nvidia hopes to give living-room televisions a run for their money with a new line of big format gaming displays launching this summer. PC makers like Acer, Asus, and HP have teamed up with Nvidia to manufacture a series of 65-inch 4K displays with HDR. In addition to Nvidia's frame-smoothing G-Sync technology, these displays come integrated with Nvidia's Android-based Shield platform, allowing users to download a variety of games and apps right out of the box.

TBA | nvidia.com

5 The Wall 146-inch Modular Television

Samsung's newest display technology uses MicroLEDs, which are similar to OLEDs in that they each emit their own individual light. The result is a display with incredibly deep blacks and vibrant colors. However, we're equally intrigued by the fact that Samsung's 146-inch Wall display features a bezel-less design. The company says this will allow consumers to combine several screens together to create a display that fits their need. The Wall is more of a tech demonstration than an actual product at this point, but we're interested to see where Samsung takes this "modular display" concept.

TBA | samsung.com



5



BLADE RUNNER 2049

Thirty years after Deckard hunted and "retired" a series of illegal replicants, a new blade runner unearths a long-buried secret that threatens to plunge society into chaos. Director Denis Villeneuve's visual masterwork is a worthy successor to the '80s classic.

\$35.99

bladerunnermovie.com

MILLA MARBLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING GRANDMA BY SAM LAKE

Milla's grandma has gone missing, so she follows a series of clues that take her into a magical world that exists inside her grandmother's wallpaper. This lighthearted children's book comes from the mind of Sam Lake – the writer behind Max Payne, Alan Wake, and Quantum Break.

\$27.00

papercutshop.se

PLAYSTATION ANTHOLOGY COLLECTORS EDITION

Compiled from over 26 interviews with some of the industry's leading figures, Geek-Line's detailed reference book chronicles the story of Sony's meteoric impact on the game's industry with the launch of the original PlayStation.

\$55.90

geekslinespublishing.com

Media Shelf

CHEERING FROM THE DIGITAL SIDELINES

Looking stylish while celebrating esports

by Javy Gwaltney

Overwatch League is in full swing and so are a number of jerseys for each team to celebrate the talent. But why stop at Blizzard's breakout shooter? From Counter-Strike to Dota, here are our favorite jerseys in the world of esports.

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1 Newbee 2017

Champions of the 2014 Dota international, Newbee has made a name for themselves over the past few years as fierce competitors. The team's jerseys do justice by them, with a simple-yet-elegant design that draws your eye to the logo and doesn't crowd the real estate with sponsors.

\$80.00 | shop.eslgaming.com

2 Panda Global

Panda Global's jersey not only excels because of the placement (and ferocity) of its logo but also for looking sleek and stylish, with long sleeves that mix red and black together to create a jersey that stands out from the pack.

\$60.00 | metathreads.com

3 Florida Mayhem

One of the 12 teams in the Overwatch League, Mayhem is composed of the smallest team in the league, with only 6 players to its name. However, these spunky underdogs also have the most striking jersey out of all the teams, with a simple but eye-catching design that uses its bright colors well.

\$60.00 | intotheam.com

4 Fnatic Player Jersey 2017

This European team has been around since 2011 and has emerged as one of the prominent teams for League of Legends. The sleek black and silver fabric does a fantastic job of making Fnatic's orange logo even more striking. There are sponsor logos but they're all mercifully relegated to the lower back of the shirt.

\$43.00 | shop.fnatic.com

5 Team Liquid 2017

Team Liquid's been around since 2010, originally as a team focused on Star Craft: Brood War, that branched out to the likes of Halo and Counter-Strike over the years. The famous team's jersey is a cool combination of silver and blue that showcases the team's emblem: a noble steed.

\$80.00 | shop.eslgaming.com

6 Mockit Pro Jersey

Mockit is one of the teams that tried their hand (or wheels, we suppose) in Rocket League's 2017 Eleague. While the team might not have taken home the cup, they're certainly the ones with the most stylish and eye-catching jersey thanks to its combination of eye-popping colors and a pretty nifty logo.

\$54.99 | mockit.gg

7 Alliance Jersey

Alliance not only took home the Dota 2 championship in 2013, but the team is also a fierce competitor when it comes to Smash Bros. Melee and Hearthstone. On top of its competitive achievements, the team also has one of the more unique jerseys out there. While many teams embrace a silver/blue color palette, Alliance runs in the opposite direction, with a pleasing combination of green and black that helps the team stand apart. 🍀

\$74.00 | store.thealliance.gg



March 2018

GAME RELEASES

Tuesday 06

- › Bravo Team (PSVR)
- › Frantics (PS4)

Tuesday 13

- › Devil May Cry HD Collection (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
- › Golem (PSVR)

Friday 16

- › Kirby Star Allies (Switch)

Tuesday 20

- › Assassin's Creed Rogue Remastered (PS4, Xbox One, PC) ❶
- › Sea of Thieves (Xbox One, PC)
- › Yakuza 6: The Song of Life (PS4)

Friday 23

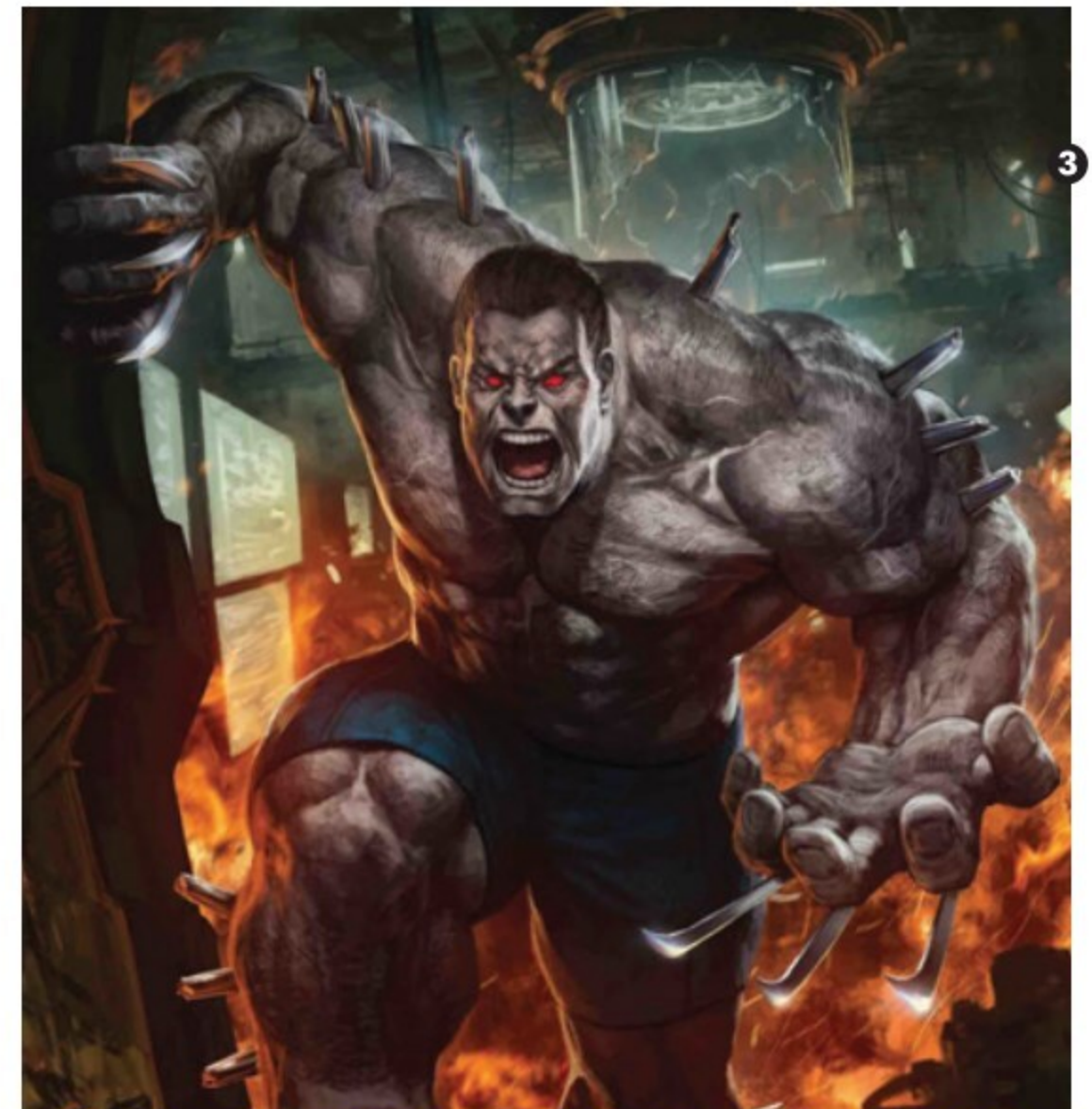
- › Detective Pikachu (3DS)
- › Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom (PS4)
- › A Way Out (PS4, Xbox One, PC)

Tuesday 27

- › Atelier Lydie & Suelle: The Alchemists and the Mysterious Paintings (PS4, Switch, PC)
- › Far Cry 5 (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
- › MLB The Show 18 (PS4)

Friday 30

- › Agony (PS4, Xbox One, PC)



MOVIE & TV PREMIERES

Friday 02

- › Alpha (theaters)
- › B: The Beginning (Netflix)
- › Death Wish (theaters)
- › Once Upon a Time (ABC)

Wednesday 07

- › Hard Sun (Hulu)

Thursday 08

- › Jessica Jones (Netflix)

Friday 09

- › A Wrinkle in Time (theaters)

Sunday 11

- › Instinct (CBS)

Friday 16

- › Tomb Raider (theaters)

Wednesday 21

- › Krypton (Syfy)

Friday 23

- › Pacific Rim Uprising (theaters) ❷

Monday 26

- › The Terror (AMC)

Friday 30

- › Ready Player One (theaters)
- › A Series of Unfortunate Events (Netflix)

GAMER CULTURE

Saturday 03

Weapon H ❸

Wolverine is nearly unstoppable. The same can be said of The Hulk. What happens when these two powerful characters become one? A new Marvel Comics series is born! Weapon H is a new ongoing comic starring Weapon X's newest experiment: The Hulk possessing the rage and claws of Wolverine. Yes, this idea is absurd, but it sounds like it'll be a fun read.

Wednesday 07

Oblivion Song

Robert Kirkman, the creator of The Walking Dead, debuts a new ongoing comic series today called Oblivion Song, a story about 300,000 Philadelphia citizens who went missing in an apocalyptic region called Oblivion. A collector's edition containing a statue is also available, but limited to just 1,000 units.

Friday 09

South by Southwest

This weeklong festival held in Austin, Texas highlights the latest developments in gaming, music, movies, and comedy. On the gaming side, SXSW offers areas dedicated to PC, arcade, indie, and tabletop gaming. You can also put your skills to the test on the esports stage in a variety of games ranging from Dota 2 to Street Fighter.

Monday 19

Game Developer's Conference

The largest professionals-only gaming event of the year kicks off today and runs for five days in San Francisco's Moscone Center. Over 26,000 people attended last year to discuss and show off the future of games. Along with dozens of speakers and panels, this show concludes with the IDF and Game Choice Awards. ❹



CELEBRATE 300



3 • 3 • 2018

MPLS

Fulton Brewing and Game Informer are commemorating Game Informer's 300th issue with a gaming-themed, limited edition repackaging of Fulton's phenomenal 300 Mosaic India Pale Ale.

Join us at the Fulton taproom during the all-day event or tune into [twitch.tv/gameinformer](https://www.twitch.tv/gameinformer) at 2:00pm CST as we show off the magazine-inspired packaging, reveal the gallery of 300 issue covers, and discuss the Top 300 Games of All Time list.

Fulton Brewing Taproom 414 6th Ave. N. MPLS, MN 55401 | gameinformer.com/joinus

A character in a gas mask and tactical gear stands in a post-apocalyptic landscape, holding a torch. The scene is dark and atmospheric, with a red and orange color palette. The character is wearing a gas mask and a tactical vest. The background shows a desolate, irradiated environment with skeletal trees and a distant structure.

LEAVING THE RAILS

Departing underground Moscow for the irradiated Russian countryside, Metro Exodus returns to 4A Games' sandbox roots

BY MATT BERTZ



» PLATFORM
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» STYLE
1-Player Shooter

» PUBLISHER
Deep Silver

» DEVELOPER
4A Games

» RELEASE
Fall

N

Nuclear dread has always hung over Andriy Prokhorov's head. Growing up in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, the Cold War loomed large. Each week during grade school, teachers walked students through civil defense lessons detailing what to do in the case of a nuclear emergency. Even at a young age, he understood the futility of ducking and covering if a 15-megaton atom bomb dropped.

"It was scary for a seven-year-old kid," he recalls. "I had nightmares about nuclear war really often."



As an adult, Prokhorov converted that morbid fascination with nuclear fallout from a nightmare to creative inspiration. Leading teams of talented artists, programmers, and designers across two companies, he helped orchestrate three of the moodiest and most haunting post-apocalyptic interactive experiences in modern gaming.

First came 2007's S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl, an ambitious open-world role-playing shooter from GSC Game World. Shortly after the tumultuous seven-year production wrapped on that project, Prokhorov left to co-found 4A Games. The Kiev-based studio wasted no time making a name for itself with the Metro series.

Based off the eponymous novels from Dmitry Glukhovsky, the series imagines a post-nuclear holocaust Russia where the last remnants of humanity engage in a constant struggle for survival within the maze of the Moscow Metro. Combining the design sensibilities of the Half-Life series with gritty survival elements, the single-player-focused games carved a unique niche in the first-person shooter landscape.

Danger is always right around the corner as players explore dimly

lit tunnels roamed by ungodly creatures, patrolled by warring human factions, and haunted by supernatural phenomena. Metro games demand players pay attention to the little things to survive, like manually replacing gas mask filters and charging flashlight batteries. All the while, 4A Games immerses players in a suffocating atmosphere. Both Metro 2033 and Metro: Last Light won widespread praise from critics and sold millions of copies.

When Metro Exodus debuted during the E3 Xbox press conference last year, it surprised and delighted attendees with a gorgeous gameplay sequence. By moving up and out of the Metro tunnels, Exodus promises a more open and varied experience powered by the impressive 4A Engine, a graphical powerhouse that takes advantage of the increased horsepower of high-end PCs, the Xbox One X, and PlayStation 4 Pro. Coming out of the show, hype is at an all-time high for the series, so we traveled to 4A Games' new headquarters to dive deep into its plans to evolve the series from strictly linear sequences to integrating more open sandbox experiences.





The interior spaces give you that classic Metro feel that an enemy could be around the corner at any time



A group of religious fanatics controls the lift bridge Artyom must lower in order for the Spartans to proceed

NUKING EXPECTATIONS

For the third entry in the Metro series, 4A Games originally planned to make an open world in Moscow that connects the vast network of stations together, but the studio wasn't enthusiastic about staying in the Moscow Metro for another four years.

"After S.T.A.L.K.E.R., we were tired of open world, so we changed the direction of Metro, and after two linear games, we were fed up with tunnels, so we said, 'Let's do something else,'" says Prokhorov, who serves as the creative director of Metro Exodus.

During the brainstorming process for alternative approaches, two artists suggested the idea of taking a train trip through post-apocalyptic Russia. The idea instantly resonated with the team, as well as Glukhovsky, who continues to work on the game series even after the conclusion of the book trilogy.

"When the guys came with the general idea, I immediately felt it was mine," Glukhovsky says. "It wasn't that they were imposing something on me, it was a natural match."

While Glukhovsky started sketching the rough narrative outline, 4A

Games dusted off its book of open-world lessons learned during the development of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. At the start, they thought the evolution would be organic, but they soon realized melding the open-ended sensibilities of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. with the narrative-driven, linear experience of Metro was more difficult than originally perceived. The early concepts gave the player a lot of freedom, but 4A felt it completely lost the Metro feel. During the iterative process, they finally settled on a hybrid that retains several linear missions throughout the game, but drops players in large survival sandboxes in between these sequences.

"The balance was quite hard to find, but I think we succeeded," Prokhorov says. "We like how we made Metro and S.T.A.L.K.E.R. friends with each other."

The most ambitious project 4A Games has attempted to date, Metro Exodus takes players on a continent-spanning journey. Don't expect the exodus to be easy, as resources are scarce, the mutants are fierce, and not every human you meet along the way is excited to see you.



The Rangers who join you on the train go out on their own missions as well

THE UNEXPECTED EVACUATION

The exodus theme of the newest Metro resonates strongly with 4A Games. In recent years, the Kiev-based studio found its beloved country of Ukraine mired in political turmoil, causing the developer to seek asylum elsewhere. First came the Euromaidan protests over the government's decision to walk away from a European Union agreement in 2013. The fallout from that civil unrest led to the Ukrainian parliament's decision to remove president Viktor Yanukovich from power. Not long after, Russian president Vladimir Putin ordered the annexation of Crimea, a key strategic Ukrainian territory bordering the Black Sea.

These dangerous circumstances certainly don't help the recruiting efforts for an independent studio looking to attract talent for its ambitious new project. Rather than grinning and bearing the political uncertainty, the studio made the bold decision to find a new home free from destabilization.

After examining the options available to them, the studio heads settled on Malta, a small, tourism-focused island country located in the Mediterranean Sea just south of Sicily. The country offered incentive-based programs for game development companies, and 4A Games liked that it's just a three-hour flight from Kiev. Over the course of several months in 2014, the studio organized its exodus, locating a new office on the island, pre-arranging apartments for 34 employees and 17 families, and chartering a private plane to get them all to the island safely. 4A Games still retains its Kiev office, which has about 80 employees, but named the new Malta location its headquarters.

"Dear motherland, this morning we're leaving you for some time," Prokhorov wrote on his Facebook page the day of the move. "Not because we don't love you, but because we have to – otherwise 4A Games will cease to exist – it's really hard to get investors while

we're at war with [Putin]. We can understand publishers, but our hearts are sorrow and we feel like betrayers, because we're leaving our country in turmoil. We're not betrayers, we love you, Ukraine and we'll have with us a new part of Ukraine in not-so-distant Malta. 4A Games Malta is a Ukrainian company."

The move paid off. 4A Games found recruiting to be much easier in Malta given its membership in the European Union. Over the course of the next three-and-a-half years, the talent influx diversified the company dramatically. Whereas the original Kiev office only had one person who wasn't Eastern European, developers from continents spanning the globe now call the Maltese office home. Their contributions are critical to meet the high expectations the studio has for its latest project.



LEAVING MOSCOW BEHIND

Metro Exodus picks up following the redemption ending of Last Light. When we last saw Artyom, he was prepared to blow the underground military bunker known as D6 into oblivion before the mysterious Dark Ones saved the day by repelling the expansionist-minded Red Line army. The Dark Ones then walked off into the great unknown, but told Artyom one day they will come back.

We rejoin Artyom two years later, and the Dark Ones seem to be the last thing on his mind. He's convinced he picked up a human radio signal aboveground a while back, and returns to the rusted parking lot of post-nuclear Moscow every day hoping to establish contact. Everyone in the Metro is convinced he's crazy.

On his journey back from another fruitless communication session, he runs into a pack of watchers, the frightening mutated beasts from previous games. Artyom fights them off with his blade and a shotgun, violently stabbing one in the face as he tries to close a door in retreat, but their numbers prove impossible to repel. As they move in for the kill, suddenly gunfire rings out. A group of Spartan sentries arrive on the scene not a second too late, sparing his life.

They carry Artyom back to the station in a stretcher, and he awakens much later with his wife, Anna, sitting by his side. "Every time you go out there I don't know if you'll ever come back," she says with a scolding tone. "Look, if the world was alive, somebody would have come already. But for all these years nobody did. We've had this conversation so many times already. We're the only survivors."

In walks Colonel Miller, Artyom's disapproving father-in-law. We last saw Miller in a wheelchair after getting his feet blown off in the D6 conflict, but an inventive Russian has since outfitted him with mechanical prosthetics. "This s--t has to stop," he says. "There's

Metro and nothing else, and Metro needs to be defended. Got it?"

The hands-off demo jumps ahead one week to another outdoor scene – Artyom has convinced Anna to accompany him on yet another attempt to establish contact. "More of nothing?" she asks. "Artyom, the only thing we can hear up here is that Geiger counter ticking."

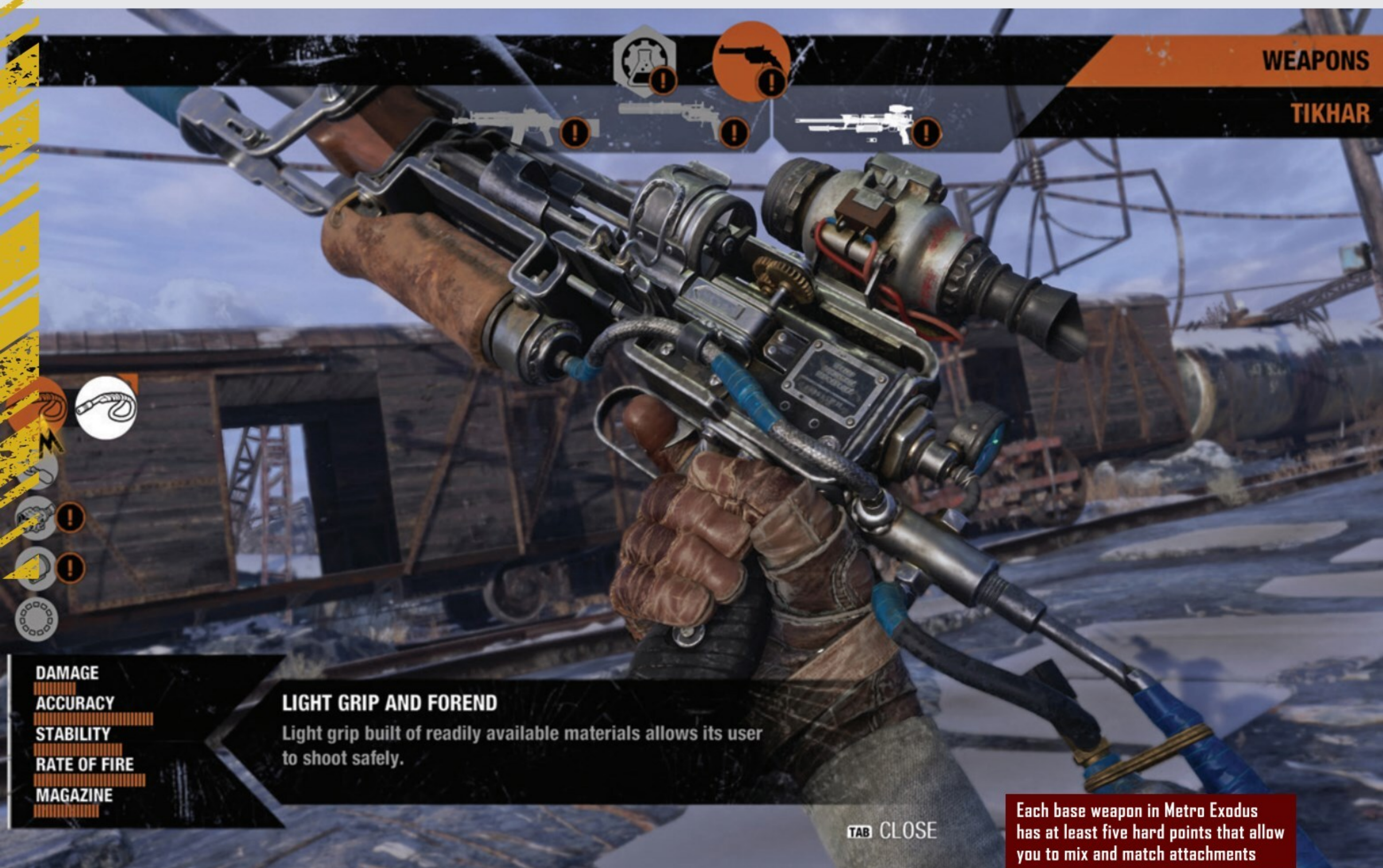
As they pack up and head back for camp, she further drives her point home. "What good are these fantasies in a silent world?" she asks. "Silent, Artyom – because it's dead."

Navigating the dilapidated Moscow ruins on the way back to the station, we see some of the new traversal mechanics in action. With fully modeled hands and feet, Artyom now can squeeze through narrow spaces, slide down slopes, and crawl through small gaps.

They reach a highway littered with abandoned cars, and immediately take cover to stay out of sight as a giant pack of watchers moves past. The winter storm increases to blizzard conditions, dramatically reducing visibility. Artyom hears his bracer alarm go off, indicating it's time to change his gas mask filter. Suddenly, they hear a sound they haven't heard in years – a train is running down the railroad track below them.

They run after it hoping to wave down the conductor, and to their right a van drives up and honks to get their attention. The soldiers in the van open the sliding door, and Anna and Artyom jump in. "How did you guys get here?" Anna asks. "Did you see the train?" Their response? A rifle stock to the face.

This early sequence plays out much like classic Metro, with measured pace, linear space, and focused storytelling. 4A Games says Exodus has several traditional levels like this sprinkled throughout the experience, but in between is when the franchise starts to spread its wings.





WEAPONS OF CHOICE

The Metro series has a reputation for inventive weaponry. Many of its guns look like a resourceful tunnel dweller slapped these makeshift firearms together with duct tape and imagination. Studio 4A Games takes weapon design very seriously, to the point that the latest game in the series has a dedicated team of six people whose job it is to make sure these guns could actually work.

"We really went all out this time to make sure that these cobbled together weapons that you see in the game are actually mechanically sound," says

executive producer Jon Bloch.

Many fan-favorite firearms return in Metro Exodus, but this time around the player has more freedom to customize the weapons to their liking. Though the number of customization options vary based on the weapon, each has several interchanging parts you can pick up along your journey. All basic weapons, for instance, have stock, magazine, sight, barrel, and attachment options. As you explore, you can find multiple weapon-specific attachments per hard point.

Metro Exodus has some new weapon

ideas up its sleeve as well. While touring the gun rack, 4A Games showed us a quad-barrel sawed-off shotgun that looks like it could put a manhole-sized hole through any mutant who stands down its sights.

In its never-ending quest for authenticity, 4A Games recorded gunfire in a variety of environments to make sure they have realistic 3D audio effects in the game. Machine gun blasts accurately reverberate around the walls of brick rooms, and rifle shots echo through open spaces.





INTO THE GREAT WIDE OPEN

4A Games won't reveal the events surrounding the Spartan Order's departure from Moscow, but our demo rejoins them as they are barreling down the railroad tracks on a commandeered steam train called the Aurora. A thick fog covers the surrounding region, which appears to be a flooded flatland. When their light finally pierces the fog in front of them, they realize too late that a group of sentries is huddled around a fire on the tracks. They hit the brakes but crash right through it. A gunfight breaks out, but the Spartans make short work of the "old farts" who took exception to their crashing the campfire.

On the horizon, we see a lift bridge that appears to be heavily guarded. Colonel Miller assembles the crew to issue orders and tasks Artyom with gathering intel in the surrounding area. He hands Artyom his trusted map, which has a compass on the front and a notepad on the back that details the story objectives. Keeping to Metro's tradition of realism, this old clipboard is all players have for navigating these open spaces – no HUD indicators, waypoints, or fast travel to make your life in this barren wasteland easier.

Before Artyom leaves the train, a man hands him a backpack that serves as a portable workshop. It doesn't come with crafting materials, so players must scavenge the bombed-out buildings and overturned cars to find the items needed to resupply gas mask filters, medkits, bullets, and other invaluable materials.

Since each new region has unique human factions, the "bullets as currency" economy found in the Metro has been replaced with this scavenging system. Various combinations of the two crafting resources – materials and chemicals – can be used to replenish vital supplies on the go. Players can also attach new weapon modifications while out in the open field – no need to visit an outpost to make changes to your loadout. However, you can't craft military-grade ammunition or repair/upgrade your vital gear with this backpack. For those more involved tasks, you must find one of the many workstations located throughout the world.

Anna accompanies Artyom on this early mission, guiding him toward

a nearby church that looks to be inhabited. But from this point forward, players have the freedom to do whatever they want in this sandbox space. If you'd rather head toward the train depot, port, warehouse, or any of the other points of interest on the horizon before tackling the next story beat, that's your call. Our demoer sticks to the script, following Anna to a boat landing.

Anna instructs Artyom to hop in the small rowboat while she heads toward a nearby antenna to provide overwatch with her sniper rifle. With the settlement's intentions still unknown, she urges him to refrain from greeting the survivors by immediately opening fire. Artyom oars the rowboat through sheets of drifting ice. Random vibrations on the otherwise glassy surface indicates something dangerous could be lurking in these waters. After rowing to a landing and scavenging some supplies out of a collapsed house, he returns to the water and follows the ominous ringing of church bells.

The church is heavily damaged, with a partially destroyed ceiling and walls, but the settlers have built some new wooden structures in and around it. A man on the dock beckons Artyom forward. "Our holy father Silantius has already started his sermon," he says. "Just enter the temple and see the light of truth. We are a peaceful lot, so please keep your weapon sheathed. And welcome!" Artyom rows into the building, where the congregation is assembled on both sides of the canal and Silantius pontificates from a platform overhead.

Previous Metro games had three warring factions based on political ideologies that preexisted in the city. None of these have left the underground, so each region in Metro Exodus introduces new indigenous factions. The worshipers gathered in this church believe technology and electronics are to blame for the world's collapse, and anyone caught using these gadgets from the past is labeled a heretic.

Silantius notices Artyom's gear and gives him a heretic's welcome, raising gates around the boat to block him from leaving. With only a matter of seconds before the church's armed guards descend on his position, his only path forward is a staircase leading up a tower. Reaching the top, he opens the door and is greeted by a woman



BOARDING THE AURORA

Similar to the *Normandy* in *Mass Effect*, *Metro Exodus* features a mobile base that the player calls home. In this case, it's an armored steam locomotive called The Aurora. This train is the Spartan Order's best bet for trekking across post-nuclear Russia in hopes of finding a new place to live.

"The Aurora will be constantly changing along the journey with more cars, different types of cars, and people that

join you," says creative director Andriy Prokhorov. "Before in *Metro* you had different stations, and now the Aurora acts as your station."

Each time you enter a new region, the Aurora will hit the brakes to serve as your base of operations. Here you can swap out weapons at the armory, chat up the crew to learn more about their backstory, and perhaps set off on adventures with them.

Artyom isn't the only soldier tasked

with venturing into the wilderness; several other Spartans have important roles to fill as well, and you may run into them during the course of your exploration. The radiated wastelands are tough to navigate, so not everyone may come back unharmed. When we ask Prokhorov whether you may miss out on adding crew members by skipping past side content in these sandbox spaces, he says "actually, it's probably more the other way around."

named Katya and her daughter. She explains they've been trapped up there for more than a year. She saw the Aurora approach out the window and says they need passage out of this place. You agree to split up and meet back at the train, where she'll give you more information about the region. Now it's up to Artyom to get out of this encampment alive.

This multi-tiered headquarters calls to mind classic *Metro* combat scenarios. With many avenues of approach, you decide how you want to handle the situation. Fearful of having a heretic in their midst, fanatics will shoot on sight. However, you can avoid combat altogether with some patience and smart non-lethal takedowns.

Whatever approach you take, the game collects statistics on your decisions. But don't expect a game-pausing presentation that makes a ceremony out of your narrative-altering choice. Given 4A Games' commitment to realism, the studio wants to disguise this system so players react naturally. "We didn't want to make it like a game where you're posed with a scenario that literally asks, 'Do you want to be good or bad?'" says executive producer Jon Bloch. "We want to see how people play, and then the game reacts to how you play."

To put it more succinctly, Prokhorov wryly says, "You will get what you deserve."

Given the segmented nature of the sandboxes in *Metro*

Exodus, you will see how your choices reverberate through the story well before the grand finale.

Our demoer errs on the side of mercy, using a series of non-lethal takedowns on the way to the escape boat. Whatever style of stealth attack you use, 4A Games overhauled the system to create more animation variance. The game now takes into account your weapon, direction of attack, movement speed, and whether you are standing or crouching, resulting a smorgasbord of brutal takedowns.



The decision to keep his weapon sheathed should play to Artyom's advantage down the road. Any fanatic he runs into during his travels won't immediately open fire, especially if Artyom keeps his weapon holstered when approaching them. 4A Games added this option so you can better declare your intent before meeting new people. Holstering your weapon also bolsters your running speed if you need to make a break for it.

On the way back to the Aurora, we see the unsettled water again. This time the threat doesn't stay underwater. Several large, mutated shrimp crustaceans leap from the water and attack the boat. Artyom fends off their advances with gunfire, but the noise attracts one of the bigger fish in the sea. Out of nowhere, a giant Tsarfish swallows the front of the rowboat, sending Artyom crashing into the frigid water. Artyom can't swim, but lucky for him a Spartan sentry stationed nearby hears the scuffle and pulls him ashore.

The sandbox spaces in Metro Exodus may not always match the suffocating tension of the tunnels, but this unexpected encounter proves there's still enough hostility in the rusted, decayed countryside to keep you on your toes. Just as in the Metro's unforgiving underground, survival on the surface won't come easy. "The idea was to increase the survival elements in this game because the more open locations encouraged this direction," Prokhorov says. "It's probably a little bit more hardcore." But as with the previous Metro games, Exodus offers difficulty balances for multiple skill levels.

Jumping to the next gameplay sequence, Artyom journeys to a shipyard to recruit an engineer named Crest, who is holed up atop a cargo crane. When we reach his abode, we see the workbench in operation for the first time. At these dedicated crafting stations, you have many



Weapon performance degrades slightly when your guns are dirty, so it's important to clean them up at workbenches

more options at your disposal than you do in the field. For instance, you can make military-grade ammo, upgrade your bracer with new items like a compass, replace broken gas mask faceguards, and add looted items to your armor like a bandolier, which lets you carry more ammo. Players may also have to spend some crafting materials on repairing weapons. Each one degrades slightly as it's used, which is communicated to the player with visual cues like dirt flying off the stock. The guns never break completely, but you may have to contend with occasional bullet stray or a slight hit to your damage output.

Crest's outpost also includes a bed, which players can use to regain some health or swap the time from day to night or vice versa. Fast-forwarding to nightfall can be a boon for stealth players hoping to infiltrate a location, though you may have to contend with more dangerous beasts once the sun fades past the horizon. Players can advance time and heal up slightly at the many campfires scattered

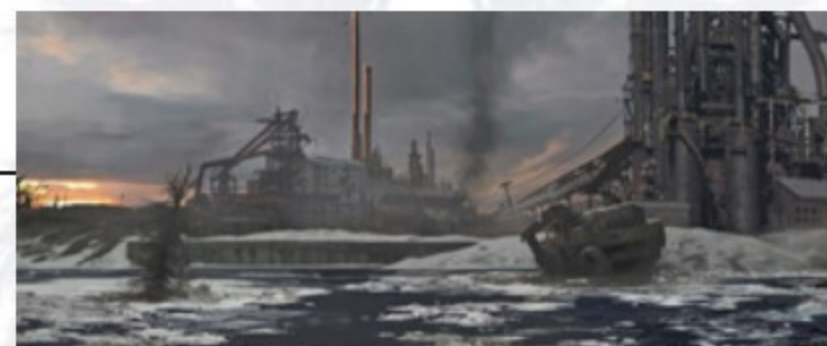
ARTYOM'S TRAVEL ITINERARY

Don't mistake Metro Exodus for a true open-world game. The game still funnels back into classic Metro linear missions during critical junctures, but at the same time provides several large survival sandboxes for players to explore.

These spaces aren't small. Whereas the largest section of Metro: Last Light capped out at 200x100 meters, these regions stretch to two square kilometers. "The size and scope of each of these big areas, there's hours of gameplay," says executive producer Jon Bloch. "There's a lot of stuff to do, and a lot of landscape to explore ... [Exodus] is larger than the past two games put together."

Each of the regions in the game takes you to a new location in Russia that has unique landscape, factions, and weather. "In the past everything's been this cold, nuclear winter," Bloch says. "Now, we get to venture out and see different seasons, different places, difference environments. It's not all going to be the concrete jungle of a bombed-out city."

This concept art gallery showcases the diversity you can expect from the game's locations.



SPRING

Winter still grips this flatland archipelago when you first arrive, but spring starts to take hold as the warm sun melts the snow and ice. The region centers on a lift bridge that Artyom must lower for the Aurora to continue on its journey. The area also features a port, train depot, and the bombed-out church headquarters of a fanatical cult.



across the regions as well.

Before Artyom ziplines down the tower toward his next objective, Crest hands him a pair of binoculars. Players can use these to mark points of interest in the various regions. After holding your gaze on a location, a question mark appears on your physical map pinpointing that place.

Once Artyom hits the ground, Miller issues a distress call. No one's heard from Anna, and the last time she was in contact she was still sniping from the antenna. Artyom double-times it to the area, where he sees a crack in the ground that leads to an underground storage space. He finds Anna half-conscious and inhaling toxic fumes, so he quickly puts her gasmask on before venturing into the cramped, darkened space. The walls are lined with bioluminescent mushrooms, and nuclear waste bins are everywhere. Here we meet another of the new enemy types in Metro Exodus: the humanimal. These furry, mutated

beasts move like apes, typically travel in packs, and communicate with guttural grunts. They also pack a punch, which Artyom finds out the hard way. A couple unexpected blows to the head cause his gas mask to crack. Since he can't replace the shield away from a workbench, Artyom improvises and patches the mask with a piece duct tape before he breathes in too much radioactive air. The humanimals continue to pour into the cramped space through any crevice they can find, leading to a frantic showdown.

Given the claustrophobic quarters, dangerous circumstances, and haunting enemies, this sequence also feels more in line with the previous iterations. "We're still making a Metro game," Bloch says. "Even in the open areas there are still aspects of that story-driven experience. Maybe it's not as linear as it's been in the past, but we still have these mechanics and opportunities to help drive these people through the environments and through the story of the game."



SUMMER

It may come as a surprise to some, but Russia has its share of arid locations as well. This desert region appears to be a dried-out area near a sea. Rusted cargo ships and submarines litter the sand, and oil pipelines run along vast stretches. 4A Games says vehicles are useful to move between areas of interest in this region. We haven't met the factions who call this barren region home, but we did see a *Mad Max*-style, fire-breathing, sheet metal human head at one of the oil depots. Sandstorms whip through this region as well, giving the player a dynamic weather element to deal with.



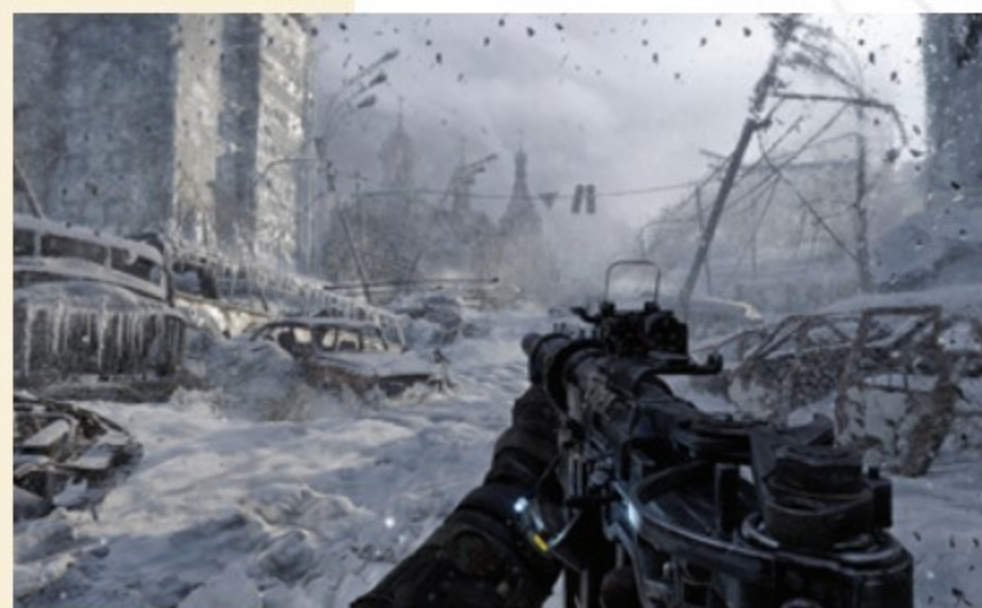
AUTUMN

This gorgeous mountainous riverside valley was first teased in the debut E3 gameplay sequence. The valley features many elevation changes and a complex cave system to explore. During a flyover of the area, we saw many man-made wooden fortresses and tree houses, as well as a marshland and dam. The fortress dwellers have a passion for stringing up the dead bodies of their foes, so we're guessing they aren't the most welcoming faction in the game.



WINTER

Metro players are already familiar with the inhospitable Russian winters, and you'll get another dose of frigid air in Exodus. We see Artyom dealing with a harsh Moscow winter in the beginning of the game.



4A ENGINE EVOLVED

Though it came out nearly five years ago, *Game Informer* still uses *Metro: Last Light* as a performance benchmark when testing new PCs given how well the 4A Engine can push graphics cards to their limits. Based on our conversations with 4A Games, it sounds like *Metro Exodus* could be our new standard moving forward.

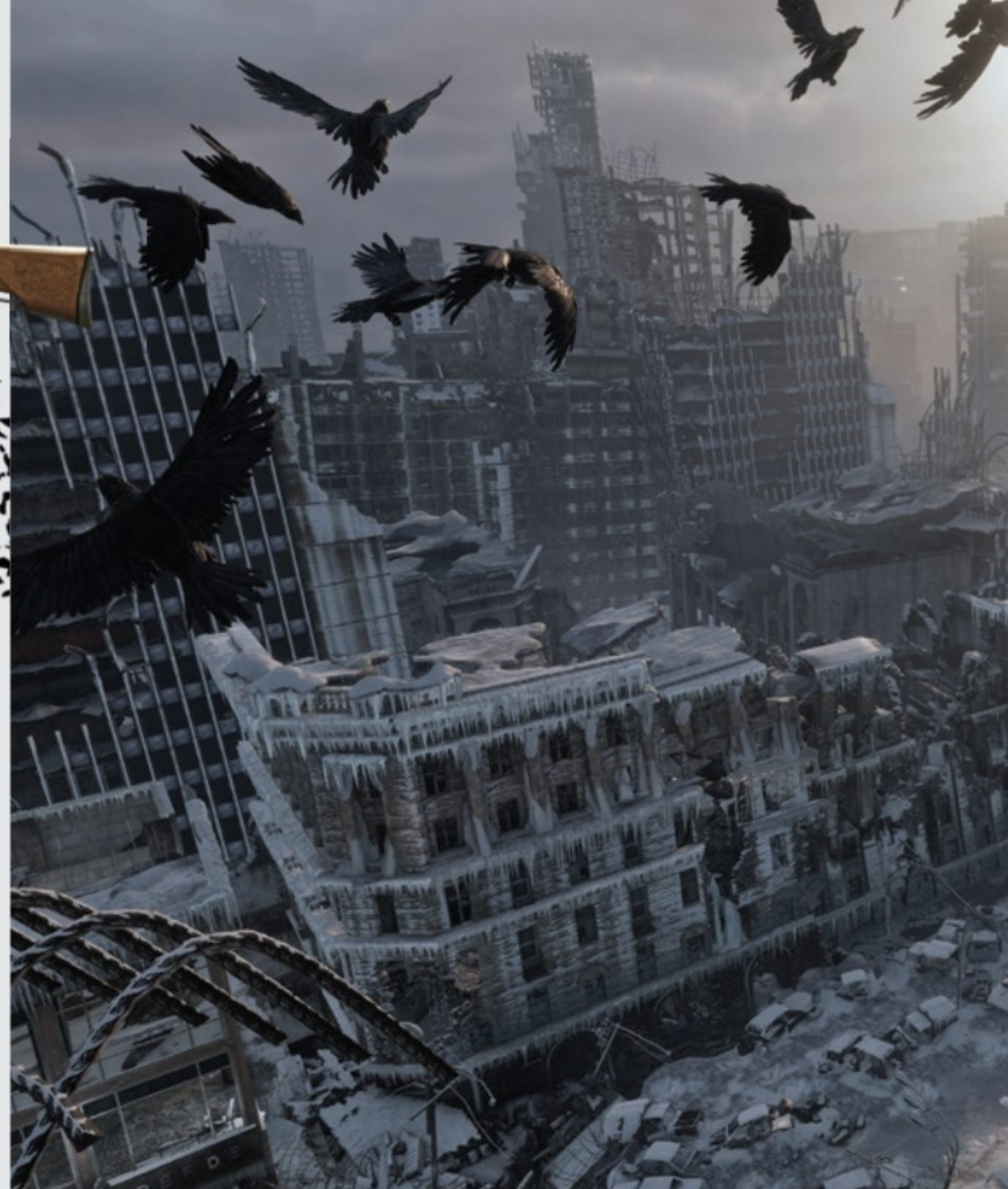
Since the 4A Engine is proprietary, the studio's technology group follows a basic principle when it comes to improvements. "We just do what we feel is necessary to meet our next goal," says art director Sergei "Karma" Karmalsky. The talented team of programmers behind the engine may balk at the team's demands, but Karmalsky says they work miracle after miracle.

With *Metro Exodus* introducing more open spaces for the player to explore, the list of goals proved long and complicated. The team demanded physics-based rendering, overhauled lighting, full facial capture for cinematics, a dynamic weather system, day/night cycles, a state-of-the-art atmospheric system, simulated A.I. biomes, and an A.I. motion controller that automates the blending of animations for non-player characters. This is so they can avoid the jittery motion common to developer-controlled state switches. The programmers delivered.

"Hopefully we're able to keep the *Metro* games as a standard for everyone's benchmarking needs," says executive producer Jon Bloch. "We love blowing up video cards."

The 4A Engine power translates to consoles as well. 4A Games plans to hit native 4K resolution with HDR support on the Xbox One X. The studio also has plans to make good use of the extra power of the PlayStation Pro, though it hasn't locked down the final specs just yet.

Reading all that technical jargon may give you heavy eyelids, but expect them to pop when you see *Metro Exodus* in motion.



VENTURING OFF THE PATH

The linear narrative takes you to many interesting locations in the Russian countryside, but if you just mainline the critical path, 4A says you will miss out on hours of expanded content. But what kind of side-content is awaiting you in the irradiated Russian countryside, exactly?

We sampled one of these offshoot missions when Artyom stumbled across a farmhouse occupied by bandits. Sneaking past some makeshift alarms made from twine and empty aluminum cans, Artyom takes position in the attic and surveys the ground level. Several bandits and a German Shepherd are milling about, and a jail cell is housing two prisoners. Artyom opens the attack by throwing a knife at the only bandit in an elevated position, then drops down to engage the rest of the group.

Here we get our first taste of how the stealth system has evolved in *Metro*. True to the studio's philosophy, you still don't have on-screen indicators that tell you when you are visible. But given negative feedback about its previous stealth systems, 4A Games implemented clever tells that help you understand when you're about to be spotted. When an enemy is looking your direction and you step out of cover, the music tension still rises, indicating you are in danger of being spotted. Once your cover is blown, the music spikes with the audio equivalent of an exclamation point. Enemies then call out your exact position and this context-sensitive chatter provides a lot more feedback about what the enemy is doing. You can still disappear into darkness, and if you stay out of sight for a while they will cease fire and start searching for you.

Still in the safety of cover, Artyom pulls out his Tihar pneumatic rifle and pumps the gun up for more bullet pressure. Loading an incendiary round into the weapon, he targets a nearby enemy, who screams and writhes in pain as the fire consumes him. The German Shepherd springs into action, knocking Artyom to the ground.

After Artyom fends off the dog and downs several of the bandits, the remaining enemies realize the futility of their resistance and hold their arms up in surrender. Artyom chooses to spare their lives and heads for the jail cell housing two religious fanatics. When he releases the prisoners the screen briefly flashes blue – a subtle tell that your decision feeds into the aforementioned morality system. Thankful for you saving them, one of the fanatics tips you off about a stash of "sinful"



Metro Exodus opens in Moscow before transitioning to the train adventure



tech that the sect confiscated from heretics such as yourself.

This tit-for-tat sequence is one example of how Metro Exodus rolls out side content. The game has no comprehensive quest list, job boards, or quest givers. Instead, players can learn about these locations by eavesdropping on idle chatter, being tipped off by non-player characters you meet, or exploring.

The variety of side content is still the biggest question we have surrounding Metro Exodus. We know you can scavenge for crafting materials, weapons, improved gear and weapon parts. Certain locations have notes, tape recordings, or visions (think the plane crash sequence from Last Light) that tell the backstory of these locations. 4A also says players may cross paths with supernatural phenomena as in the previous games, but wouldn't speak to whether or not the Dark Ones are involved in the story. Will these tangential experiences inject enough surprise and variety to compel people to explore these sandbox regions? We won't know until we can spend a considerable amount of time in them.

MOVING DOWN THE TRACKS

Artyom's journey through the irradiated wasteland of Russia in Metro Exodus may be steeped in challenges and setbacks, but obstacles are par for the course when trying to write your own destiny.

The founders of 4A Games has faced its share of improbable challenges chasing their dreams as well. The team learned open-world game design on the fly, endured unrelenting political unrest in Ukraine, and ultimately uprooted its developers' families to establish a new home in Malta. All along the way, it continues to refine its process and deliver memorable first-person shooters.

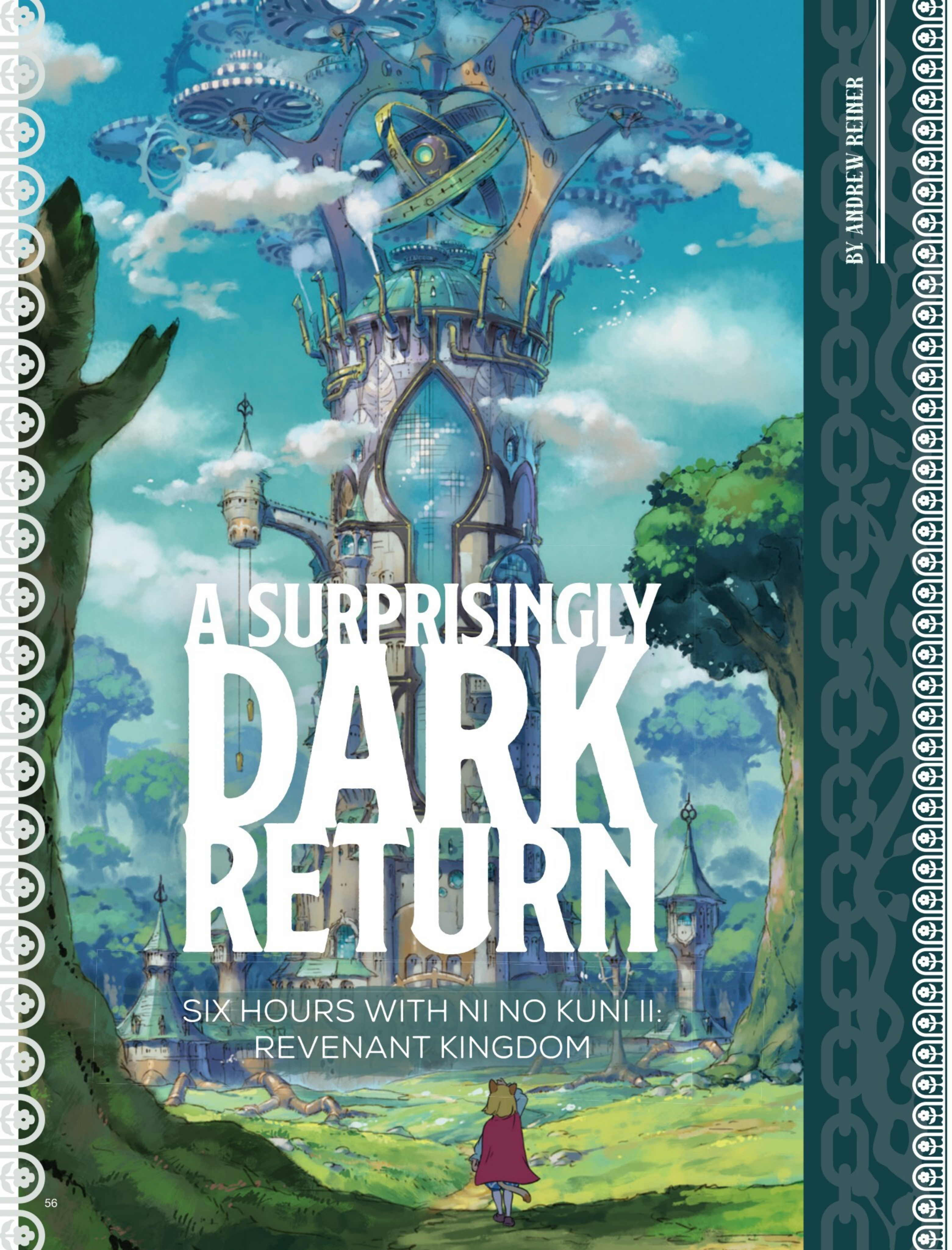
With the benefit of a more stable development situation, Metro Exodus builds on the legacy of its predecessors in promising new

ways. The new-and-improved 4A engine powering this adventure is impressive, rivaling industry giants like DICE's Frostbite engine. The studio's reunion with sandbox spaces has both S.T.A.L.K.E.R. and Metro fans excited, and the powerful E3 presentation has captured the imagination of an even wider audience. But even as the scope of the Metro franchise grows, to 4A Games this is a deeply personal project.

"We are making Metro Exodus for ourselves," Prokhorov says. "We hope that if we like this game, someone else will, too." ♦

Go to gameinformer.com/metroexodus for a month of exclusive Metro Exodus features, including interviews, concept art, and a video tour of the Metro weaponry





BY ANDREW REINER

A SURPRISINGLY DARK RETURN

SIX HOURS WITH NI NO KUNI II:
REVENANT KINGDOM



For every talking cat and rainbow-colored village, *Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom* offers a dark alternative, like a treasonous rat or a city glowing in ruin after an attack. I spent six hours playing through the sequel's opening act, and walked away pleased by just how different this journey is so far. I just didn't expect it to be so dark and violent.

If *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* can be summarized as a heartfelt story about a child dealing with loss, *Revenant Kingdom* instead focuses on the turmoil of war. The toll it takes on a young king and a mysterious man displaced between worlds is center stage. It moves from the youthful vigor of *White Witch* to a more mature whimsy, all while retaining a high level of inspiration from the famed Studio Ghibli.

Ghibli partnered with Level-5 and Bandai Namco to develop *Wrath of the White Witch*, but is not directly involved with this sequel. However, that doesn't mean the Ghibli touch is completely gone. Yoshiyuki Momose, an animator on *Spirited Away*, and Joe Hisaishi, the composer of *Princess Mononoke*, left Ghibli and joined Level-5 to continue work on the series.

From my brief look at the game, it's apparent developer Level-5 wants fans to feel like they've returned home when venturing back into Ding Dong Dell. Although hundreds of years have passed since the events of the first game, I couldn't shake the familiar feeling of this place even though I was venturing into areas I've never seen before. It all feels strangely comforting, and most locations deliver that magical, lived-in vibe that accompanies most Ghibli creations.

Just don't expect the story's opening act to enchant you or tug at your heartstrings in the same ways *Wrath of the White Witch* did. New protagonist King Evan Pettywhisker is roughly the same age as Oliver, but he isn't a free spirit searching for answers. He's immediately tasked to rebuild a kingdom and protect its people, leaving little time for anything other than war, bloodshed, and reconstruction.



» **PLATFORM**
PS4 • PC

» **STYLE**
1-Player
Role-Playing

» **PUBLISHER**
Namco Bandai

» **DEVELOPER**
Level-5

» **RELEASE**
March 23

LONG LIVE THE KING

Revenant Kingdom begins with a literal bombshell. A fiery explosion leaves a character named Roland, who we learn is the president of a thriving metropolis, for dead. As his life passes, his body turns into a blue energy, and is transported from his world to the different world of Ding Dong Dell. In Roland's reality, he is 48 years old, greying in hair, and serious in expression; in Ding Dong Dell, he reawakens roughly half of that age, black in hair, and filled with a youthful exuberance.

Roland was on his way to a political summit in his world, yet now questions whether he's dead or dreaming. He entered Ding Dong Dell at the exact moment of a coup against its ruler. The villainous Otto Mausinger assassinated the king, and has ordered his troops to seize the castle and kill everyone within it. "It is time for mousekind to assume its rightful place at last," he triumphantly exclaims from the throne room. Roland has no clue what is happening, yet is being hunted. This kingdom is ruled by strong magics and swords, but Roland has a different way of protecting himself – a pistol, which he uses to gun down two mouse guards moments after awakening.

As Roland searches for answers, he confronts a young, long-eared boy named Evan, who is trying to flee the castle. They mutually agree to help each other. At this point, the player controls the gun-toting Roland, which raises the question about whose game this really is. *Wrath of the White Witch* followed Oliver, who was lost between worlds. Roland fills that role in this story, yet the early plot points focus more on Evan trying to rise up as the kingdom's rightful king. Again, we should expect the unexpected from Level-5. The studio has a darker story in mind, and isn't afraid to flip the script on fans. The game still feels like *Ni No Kuni*, yet delivers a higher intensity. The pacing is also much faster, both for the story and gameplay.

Roland and Evan make haste through the castle, dispatching any enemies along the way, and locating a secret passage that leads them into the sewers. Gameplay at this point focuses intently on hack-and-slash action, another huge twist for

this sequel. Level-5 is prioritizing fluidity and speed in dungeon exploration, meaning combat engagements happen in real time, no longer transitioning to a battle screen or post-battle statistics. The party still celebrates victory with a quick raising of the sword, but after that, it's back to running and fighting. The only time the battle pauses is when the player needs to use an item.

Roland's pistol packs a punch against the mouseguard forces, but he is also surprisingly talented with a sword. He can unleash a variety of combos using light and heavy attacks, and summon magical blasts to decimate his foes. The combat sequences are frantic and fun, yet difficult to read given the number of foes and magical effects that crowd the screen. Ripping through a dungeon at a break-neck speed is a nice change of pace, but it doesn't necessarily feel like an RPG at this point. My characters are gaining levels in the background, but I'm not tasked to assign any skill points. I just have to make sure I assign new weapons and armors (which are doled out quickly). Strategy was the backbone of combat in *Wrath of the White Witch*, as the player had to manage companion monsters and keep a close eye on enemy tactics. Combat in *Revenant Kingdom* is a bit of a free-for-all.

After successfully fleeing the castle, Evan knows he needs to fight back and claim his throne, but doesn't know where to start. Thankfully, he has Roland at his side to guide him. The duo emerges into *Revenant Kingdom's* overworld. Their look has changed from the somewhat realistic Studio Ghibli aesthetic to a bobblehead-like chibi style – a strange appearance that doesn't mesh well with the rest of the game. The world they set foot in is huge and filled with paths to explore, chests to unearth, and a surprisingly high number of random items to pick up – from coarse cords to greenglade cotton. Monsters also roam the land and can be engaged with freely. For these fights, the game reverts back to a separate battle screen. Most of these conflicts are geared for the party's level, but I did see a few beasts that are much higher levels off in the distance.

Roland and Evan are desperate for help, and will go anywhere to find it. Their first stop is a small cottage owned by the adorable Auntie Martha, a character who looks true to Studio Ghibli's signature style. Her home is overrun with little critters called Higgledies, which look like they are from the same genus as the Kodama in *Princess Mononoke*. These creatures are born of the world and are colored after its elements. Martha gifts Evan a Higgledy named Runcible the Righteous. This adorable little fellow is white in color and hangs out on the battlefield to provide support, such as boosting the power of regular attacks, restoring hit points, and summoning a comically designed cannon to blast foes. The player can have four different Higgledies with them at any time. These little helpers can also recruit their own kind for support. By the end of my playthrough, I had 14 Higgledies running with me on the battlefield. In a way, they replace the familiars from *Wrath of the White Witch*, but aren't the driving force of combat and are mostly tucked out of view, lending aid when needed.

In my six hours with Revenant Kingdom, no combat encounter lasted long or delivered much of a challenge. Even the bosses, who have huge health bars, fell with ease. I hope this changes in the later chapters, as the combat mechanics are nicely designed and deliver a true sense of power; they just aren't put to good use in the opening chapters.



Lofty serves as Evan's "kingmaker," and isn't afraid to challenge him

SKY PIRATES

Evan and Roland end up traveling through Cloudcoil Canyon, an area lined with red rock and the bones of giant beasts from another time. Here, they run into a salesman who gifts them a device called the Leafbook, which is Ding Dong Dell's equivalent of an iPad. The Leafbook gives players up-to-date news on the events happening

across the kingdom, along with a Twitter-like feed of citizens reacting to the hot scoops. These stories are entertaining and do a nice job of carrying plot points forward, yet are completely optional.

For the sake of spoilers I won't detail what happens next, but Evan's leadership skills are put to the test by a group calling themselves the Sky Pirates. This

rough-and-tumble group of outlaws don't think he has what it takes to lead, challenging him in numerous ways.

After Evan appeases the Pirates' demands and goes out of his way to help them with a critical issue, he gains the support of two new party members: Tani, a high-spirited girl roughly his age who wields a spear and a bow, and her hulking father Batu, who alternates between ax and mallet attacks. He isn't Evan's biggest fan. Although the party size is now four, only three can journey together. The new ensemble hatches a plan to take back Ding Dong Dell by establishing a new base.

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEARTLANDS

Evan is young and inexperienced, yet is tasked to fulfill all of the duties of king, and this includes sending his people to war. For his kingdom to grow, he knows he must seize territory to build a new stronghold. Under the guidance of Roland, he selects a location in the Heartlands as a potential base. This area features a sprawling field and ocean access. Unfortunately, it's under the control of bandits, likely working for chancellor Mausinger.





Auntie Martha has a temper, but ends up being a great help in Evan's quest



You rotten devil of a thing, you!



To take over this land, Evan and his forces must engage in all-out war. This action is handled through a new kingdom battle, which pits small pockets of A.I.-controlled units against one another. The player has a large hand in how this battle unfolds, determining how the troop formations flow, when they should unleash their special attacks, and in which order enemy units and structures should be targeted. While rich in strategy, this battle is crudely animated, with bobble-headed soldiers waving swords up and down to great effect. The battle, as silly as it looks, is a nice change of pace. It also provides another deep well for players to invest time in, whether it's recruiting new troop types, or engaging in more conflicts to raise Evan's military might.

Revenant Kingdom, while trying to remove the need to pause during battle, pushes players to spend time in menus to advance the party, kingdom, and higgledy might. One such area comes from battle points, which are earned through play and can be cashed in at the Tactic Tweaker menu to aid the party in four categories: arts of war, elements and ailments, spoils, and monster affinities. In the arts of war section, the

player can raise party brutality, durability, untouchability, fleet-footedness, dynamism, and eagle-eyedness. In monster affinities, the beasts players encounter are split into six groups, and by exchanging battle points, weapons and items receive damage bonuses against those types.

BUILDING A NEW FUTURE

With land for a new home secured, Evan and his small band of resistance fighters begin building, but they don't have the supplies for more than a handful of tents. Again, they don't know where to start, and decide to head into the forest to find any form of help. In the heart of the dangerous woodlands, they encounter a cat named Floyd who agrees to join them as a chef, claiming he knows how to make delicious bread. Evan promises to help him find ingredients that can be used for other dishes. Up until this point, I've been collecting a wide range of items that didn't have a use – including ingredients. Now they can be used to craft healing supplies.

Being able to eat is great, but the new kingdom cannot be built without wood. The so-called "Master of the Forest" has plenty to spare, but won't part with it since he no longer owns it. He

lost it all in a dice game against someone named Pugnacious. The Master says they'll find him in the casino-riddled city of Goldpaw.

That's where my time with Revenant Kingdom ends. What began as an aggressively dark tale now clings to hope. Being tasked to build a kingdom from scratch is a great (and daunting) proposition. It worked for Konami's Suikoden series and holds immense promise here.

Revenant Kingdom still looks like a Ghibli creation and offers a higher level of complexity in its gameplay types. I look forward to seeing where Evan and Roland's journey takes them, yet have a number of reservations about the new approach to combat and just how useful the new collectible Higgledies end up being. We don't have long to wait for these answers, as Revenant Kingdom is just a month away. 💎





TESTING THE WATERS

*Hands on with **Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire**, Obsidian's swashbuckling sequel*

by Matt Miller

» **PLATFORM**
PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC • Mac • Linux

» **STYLE**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **PUBLISHER**
Versus Evil,
Obsidian Entertainment

» **DEVELOPER**
Obsidian Entertainment
(PC, Mac, Linux),
Red Cerberus
(PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

» **RELEASE**
April 3
(PC, Mac, Linux),
Holiday
(PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

The isometric RPG is in the midst of a renaissance. Games like *Divinity: Original Sin II*, *Torment: Tides of Numenera*, and *Shadowrun: Hong Kong* are just a few of the recent standouts, reigniting enthusiasm for a gameplay style popularized by classics like *Baldur's Gate*. *Pillars of Eternity* was a love letter to those original masterpieces. Obsidian's first game in the series gave us a glimpse at one corner of an imaginative and beautifully realized fiction. Now, with *Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire*, Obsidian is throwing us into the deep end of the ocean.

"When we started out with the first game, we intentionally skewed conservative," says game director Josh Sawyer. *Pillars of Eternity* echoed the *Dungeons & Dragons* *Forgotten Realms* setting, which inspired so much of the

genre through *Baldur's Gate*. The first game was a playground of gorgeous-but-familiar fantasy locales – wizard towers, dense forests, and quaint villages – all great fun to explore, but rooted in the visual language and tropes of fantasy role-playing.

Deadfire steps into a landscape of cutlass-wielding pirates, volcanic islands, and a thick stew of original cultures. "When it came time to make the sequel, we knew right away that we were going to have a lot of opportunities to have a much different visual style, and we would introduce a culture that felt very not-European," Sawyer says. "It's not like there's no connection to the first game. But *Deadfire* allowed us to start exploring other cultures and architecture, and really extend the style of our art."



That lavish visual presentation is one of the first things I notice during the several hours I spend in the lands of the Deadfire Archipelago, thanks to an extended look at a near-complete version of the game. Dynamic weather patterns and rich tropical foliage help the world feel alive and exotic – a change from the first game’s conventional, static backdrops. Almost from the moment the game begins, Deadfire is an adventure of exploration and discovery. Fog blankets the world map, and I guide my own ship across the ocean, waiting to uncover the secrets of islands that lurk beyond my sight. Pirates roam the waterways, and characters speak in a strange patois I must learn as I go. Especially early on, the potential for discovery seems limitless. While a linear narrative is emphasized, it’s just as easy to go off the rails and travel anywhere. “In a game where we are trying to stress player agency, instead of constantly backing up and saying, ‘don’t let the player go there,’ we embrace the sense of role-playing and the player being in control of their destiny,”

Sawyer says.

Pillars of Eternity II feels like a new and largely standalone adventure, but it is a direct sequel to the first game, and even has the option to carry your character forward from the original. For those of us who played the prior game, the intro hits where it hurts. The fortress I so lovingly crafted throughout the last game is destroyed in the cataclysmic rebirth of a titanic god, who kills most of my followers and castle residents, steals a portion of my soul and power, and then marches out into the islands of a massive archipelago. It would be a shame to spoil the beats of the story that follows, but the tone of the narrative is clear right away. The Deadfire is a region in turmoil, where often-violent factions of pirates, trading companies, and native peoples are in competition for control. After just a few hours, I can see the ways my choices in conversations and battles are reshaping how it will all turn out.

As the region’s politics plays out around me, the looming threat of the reemergent god

Eothas is a constant presence through impossibly large footprints, devastating weather events, and more. “Eothas is as tall as many skyscrapers in Chicago – we did the measurements,” Sawyer laughs. “He leaves physical marks in the environment. We wanted to make sure he had a real presence in the world, that people notice, so you didn’t feel like you were pursuing this thing alone, and the world was not responding to it.”

Your pursuit of Eothas is punctuated by encounters large and small, from world-shaking moments caused by the passing of a deity, to smaller events like gleaning the truth behind a bar fight over a gambling disagreement. In many cases, the encounters I run into call back to themes of cultural collision, the threats and opportunities of colonization, and the joy of exploration.

For many players, the delight of this kind of RPG is an eclectic cast of party members. From returning characters like Edér and Aloth to newly announced heroes like Tekehu (see sidebar), Obsidian has invested heavily in compelling role-playing opportunities within the group. As I explore the archipelago, I notice that my companions chime in more frequently, and they respond not just to my dialogue, but to the rest of the party. Depending on where I lead conversation, friendships and enmities form between my companions. “There are certain topics that different companions will respond positively and negatively to, like someone being very anti-god, or someone being racist, or someone being cruel to animals,” Sawyer says. “That moves relationships in a certain direction. If you don’t have those topics come up, then the relationship could develop differently. Much like being at Thanksgiving with your racist uncle, there are topics you might try to avoid in conversation because you know it’s going to set someone off.” The effect is one of an ever-deepening party dynamic reminiscent of a tabletop role-playing campaign.

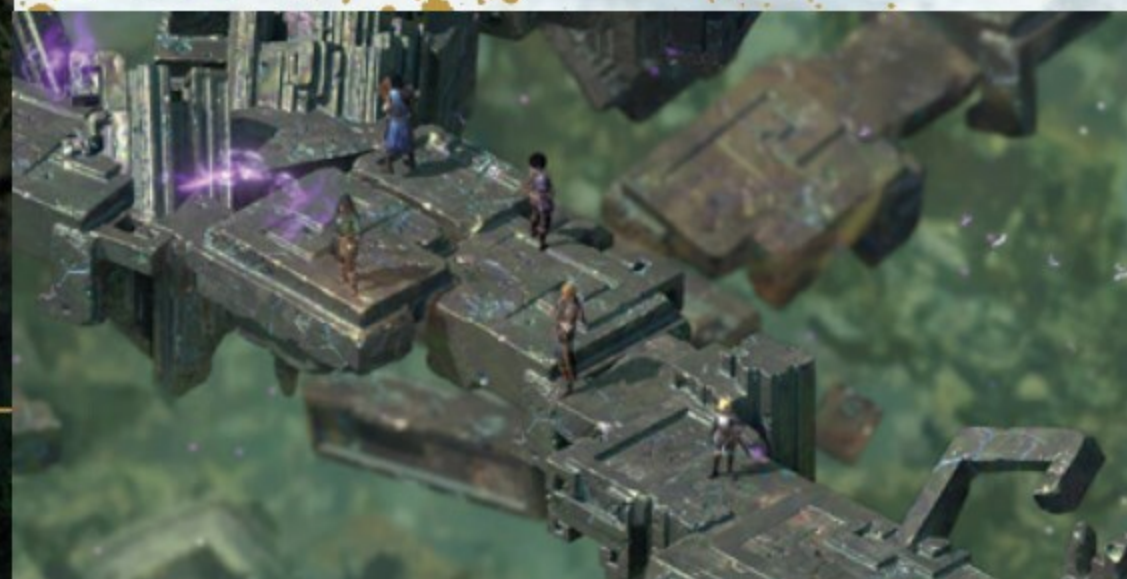
A New Companion

Deadfire features seven companions with dedicated questlines, along with four potential sidekicks to join your party. We were lucky enough to get a first look at one of the central companions, a new hero named Tekehu. Born as a godlike, Tekehu is one of the rare individuals in the Pillars universe whose physical appearance and abilities reflect divine traits. He is a marine godlike, with aspects of his physical appearance reflecting the oceans he lives near. Most dramatically, that birthright manifests itself as the ability to transform partially into a shark (fulfilling one of game director Josh Sawyer’s lifelong ambitions to include a wereshark character in a game). Tekehu is headstrong, amorous, and well known in his home city, but as he joins the group in further-flung locations, it’s clear he’s inexperienced with the ways of the outside world beyond his native culture. From a tactical perspective, the player chooses his class role as a druid, chanter, or a multi-class that offers a bit of both.





.....
The pace of the real-time combat has slowed down, making it easier to make tactical decisions



Platform Of Choice

The core audience for Pillars of Eternity eagerly awaits its release on PC, and that's the first place players can play the game when it hits on April 3.

However, publisher Versus Evil revealed to us that the game is also making its way to The PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and Switch. These versions are targeting release before the end of 2018.

While a compelling cast is essential, another key component in an isometric RPG is exciting, challenging combat. The original Pillars of Eternity can point to a lot of successes on that score, but after only a few battles in Pillars of Eternity II, the difference is clear. The default speed of combat has slowed down, allowing me to make interesting tactical choices without always falling back on the pause-and-play options. From explosive barrels to particle-filled spells, the combat effects still look great, but they also give a better view of the action as it unfolds. When things get especially chaotic, the opacity on those brilliant effects is even more subdued when I pause, leading to easier tactical play.

Behind the scenes, the underlying rules system simply makes more sense. Afflictions and inspirations interact with one another in sensible ways, and using status effects to my advantage is easier. "We really wanted to focus on clarity in combat," Sawyer says. "It should be much easier to understand the fundamentals of combat, and it should be easier to make tactical decisions. We didn't want the tactical depth of the game to be affected."

All that is on top of a thrilling new tableau for battles: ship combat. Ship-to-ship duels play out in slow-paced, turn-based, scripted sequences, which balances a narrative flair with the details provided through ship upgrades and weapons. When the ships come close, the scenario switches to the more familiar isometric view, where deck-to-deck conflict plays out between your crew and the enemy. As a result, players can embrace the new turn-based system, or simply close quickly and push ahead to the real-time party-based battles. On a broader level, the ship experience feels roughly analogous to the fortress development of the previous game, but much more integrated into



the adventure. "It's a scaleable level of involvement," Sawyer says. "You can stick with a small crew and have it be relatively low-impact. But if you want to go crazy, you can get the super high-end ships, upgrade everything, hunt pirates across the Deadfire, and it can be this big and involving system."

Hardcore RPG fans expect a hefty challenge, so I also experimented by playing on higher difficulties. The A.I. has the potential to be absolutely brutal, combining spell timing, sudden flanking ambushes, and traps in ways that should challenge even the most masochistic veterans. The game may show its most sophisticated colors on those higher difficulties, but on the other end of the spectrum, a story-focused difficulty mode is available from the start. Here, tactical complexity is left by the wayside, allowing an exploration of

Deadfire for its plot and characters, minus the punishing tactics.

Games like Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire can be a hard sell for newcomers. The politics, language, and cultures of the game world seem intimidating, and the combat systems and extensive character options even more so. But that might be what is most impressive about Obsidian's work on the Pillars franchise so far. The studio has gone to remarkable lengths to make Pillars of Eternity II accessible and understandable, but never at the cost of depth for more experienced players. From tooltips and tutorials to smartly written dialogue and transparent combat, Pillars of Eternity II is more welcoming than you might think. If you're looking for a big RPG to get lost in, my time in the Deadfire Archipelago suggests you don't have long to wait. ♦

Darksiders III

On the dark side of the apocalypse

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
THQ Nordic

» **Developer**
Gunfire Games

» **Release**
2018

We love Darksiders' death metal take on the classic Zelda formula, but each new entry offers a slightly unique spin on the concept. Where Darksiders II offered Diablo-style loot, with Darksiders III developer Gunfire Games rethinks dungeon design altogether. Gone is the hub and spoke design of classic Zelda games. Now players explore one massive interconnected dungeon that seems to never end.

"The world in Darksiders III is much more organic," says game director Dave Adams. "The game is one massive dungeon, with each area of the game integrated and linked together. Hub and spoke can kill exploration a bit, because once you complete a spoke of the game, you rarely want to go back. However, with all the areas

seamlessly integrated together, you find yourself traversing back through areas that you had previously explored quite frequently – often with new abilities allowing you to access previously inaccessible areas."

One of the new zones within this interconnected dungeon is a space called the Hallows. This underground network of caves has existed deep within the earth since the beginning of time, but was strangely never discovered by man. This area is a sprawling cavern full of stalactites, and its craggy walls are lit by waterfalls of magma.

"One of the big themes in the original Darksiders was bringing fantasy to the real world, and that's a theme we wanted to return to in Darksiders III," Adams says. "Even though Darksiders III takes place on Earth, we wanted to

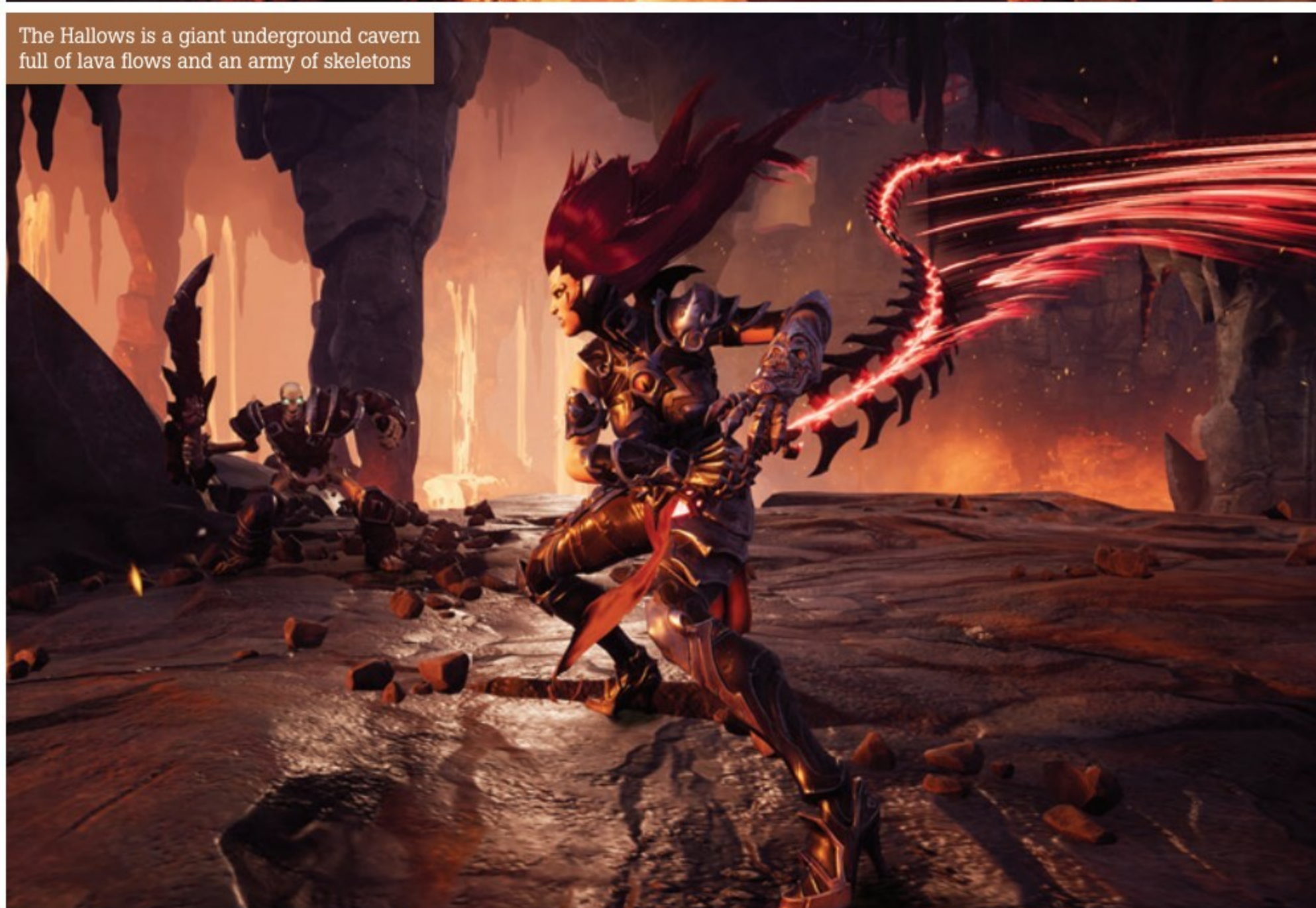
create locales that felt fantasy inspired. In doing so, we challenged ourselves to come up with areas that were as far out there and imaginative as possible."

A small army of skeleton warriors inhabits the Hallows, but these enemies are relatively easy to dispatch. The lumbering giant called the Lava Brute offers a greater threat. This demon wields a massive hammer and has an explosive area attack that forces players to keep their distance. Upon death, the Lava Brute explodes in a cascade of tiny rock that will immediately kill anyone who lingers to gloat about their victory.

"One big change with Darksiders III is the change in enemy pacing," Adams says. "In Darksiders I and II, players were flooded with large amounts of enemies, and generally locked into rooms via magical barriers. One of the



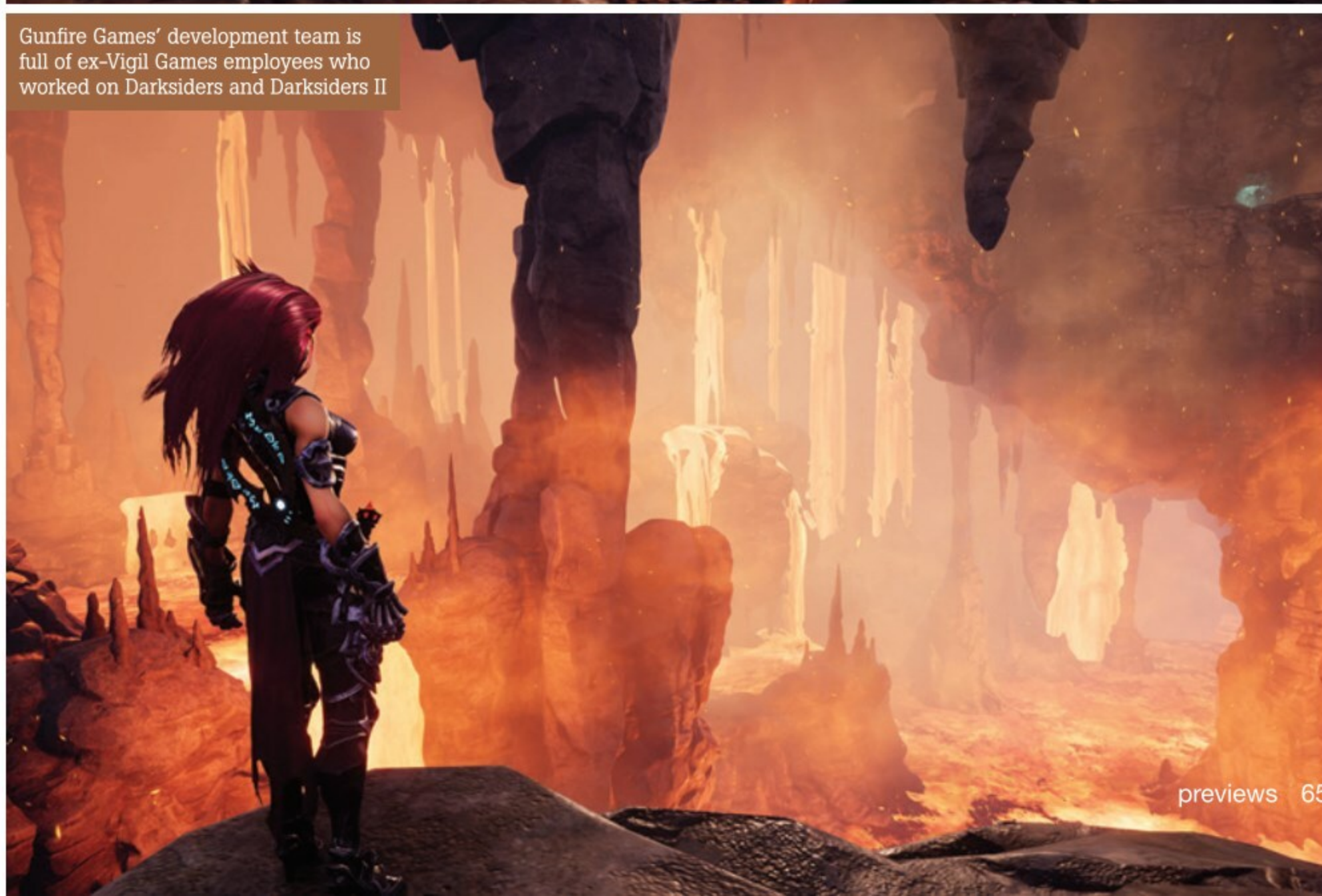
The Hallows is a giant underground cavern full of lava flows and an army of skeletons



first things we said with Darksiders III was 'No more barriers.' ... We are also focusing on fewer but more technical enemies. So, instead of fighting wave after wave of enemies, you may only fight two to three enemies at a time, but those enemies must pose an equivalent challenge."

For almost a decade, the Darksiders franchise has told a twisted interpretation of the Biblical apocalypse. The first two games followed War and Death as they dealt with the consequences of "the end times." Darksiders III follows Fury as she sets off to kill the Seven Deadly Sins and bring order back to planet Earth. Hopefully, Gunfire's plans for this entry come together and the game proves to be a success, because there is one more horseman we'd like to see get the spotlight. » **Ben Reeves**

Gunfire Games' development team is full of ex-Vigil Games employees who worked on Darksiders and Darksiders II



Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life

Painting the towns red

- » **Platform**
PS4
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
- » **Publisher**
Sega
- » **Developer**
Sega
- » **Release**
March 20

Sega says Yakuza 6 marks the end of longtime hero Kazuma Kiryu's story, which is bittersweet. Over the years, fans have grown to love the so-called Dragon of Dojima for his fierce loyalty and determination, unrivaled fighting abilities, and passion for throwing down whenever karaoke calls. At the same time, the Yakuza team has created a rich world (and underworld) over the course of the series, and it's probably time for them to tell someone else's story. That's not to say we won't miss him. With that in mind, I spent a few hours in the as-yet-unreleased English version of Yakuza 6 giving Kiryu the time of his life – or the early game equivalent.

I start out in the streets of Kamurocho, Kiryu's long-time stomping grounds. It's a familiar location in

the series, but getting around is easier than ever. You can now place Beacons on the map to guide you to your objective. My first stop? Club Sega, of course. I then switch to a first-person view and walk to the arcade in a stunning approximation of actually being there. Everything from the signage to the architecture to the clothing of the passersby feels authentically like what you would have seen in Tokyo in 2015. I duck into a convenience store along the way, walking down its lovingly recreated aisles and picking up a bento box to go. You never know when you might need a snack, after all.

A few moments later, I run into a group of thugs. I could have moved away from them, but I'm not about to give these low-level creeps the satisfaction. They're more than happy to

start brawling, and the camera snaps back to the traditional third-person view for the battle. Unlike previous Yakuza games, which created small, penned-off areas during the fights, it's a seamless process in 6. There aren't any boundaries lined with fist-pumping bystanders; instead, the fight just starts where we were standing. It's been a while since Kiryu was on the streets (no spoilers), but his skills haven't stagnated. He's just as adept at stringing together brutal combos, throwing enemies at their friends, and – most importantly – breaking bicycles over their heads. As his attacks connect, I enter into a new ultimate heat mode, which puts Kiryu into a frenzy. I save it for the leader of the gang, or at least the one who was cracking his knuckles at me with the most menace.



Don't Fear The 6

The series' timeline has jumped around a fair bit over the past few years, as Sega released a prequel entry, Yakuza 0, and a remake of the first game, dubbed Yakuza Kiwami. Even if you haven't played through those two games – and you really should – the opening moments of Yakuza 6 incorporate flashbacks and dream sequences to get players acquainted with the story's major players. It's no small feat, considering we're jumping ahead four games from Yakuza Kiwami, but it doesn't feel as though you're dropping into the middle of an episode of a long-running serial drama.

Battles are now seamless in the open world, and you can even run away from fights if you're too busy or feel outclassed



Kiryu unloads a string of powerful punches at him, which can be extended with a series of QTEs.

Who knows why these goons were causing so much trouble, when there was a healthier outlet for their boredom just a block away. I walk into Club Sega, and immediately make a home at a Puyo Puyo cabinet. I love the puzzle game, and it's a weird sensation to play it within another game like this. It gets weirder when I put some virtual yen in another cabinet and play a complete version of Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown. Nothing against Space Harrier 3-D, but this is a definite improvement.

After a few rounds, it's time to eat. That bento box doesn't seem quite as appetizing, especially when there's a Smile Burger so close by. I head in and grab a burger, fries, and a shake. Picking those three items from the

menu triggers a hidden food-combo bonus, giving me an extra XP reward. Not bad! In a series known for so many diversions, it's hilarious to see them sneaking a tiny bit of gameplay in something as mundane as ordering food. Not that I'm complaining.

I wrap up my Tokyo adventure with a stop at a karaoke room. After paying my admission, I'm treated with one of the saddest sights in all of gaming: former chairman of the Tojo clan Kazuma Kiryu singing karaoke dead sober in the middle of the day. Alone. He doesn't seem to mind, however, providing enthusiastic accompaniment to the J-pop's bubbly singing. The rhythm minigame remains simple and satisfying, and I hit the top of the leaderboards with each song before the hostess gives me the old heave-ho.

That's just the start of the adventure. The story takes us to a provincial town

in Hiroshima Prefecture, which is a significant shift from Tokyo's neon-illuminated glitz. I won't get too far into why Kiryu is there, but it's a nice change of pace nonetheless. There aren't as many structured activities as in Tokyo, at least early in the story, but that's not to say it's without incident. Kiryu quickly finds himself embroiled in yakuza drama there, and while the key players may be new to me, the struggle is quite familiar.

This may be the end of Kazuma Kiryu's story, but I can't get too worked up about it quite yet. If past games are any indication, we're going to have an extremely long goodbye, with hours upon hours spent on the central story as well as a nearly endless supply of optional side content. Whether Kiryu leaves on his own terms or in a casket, one thing's for certain: We're going to have a lengthy going-away party starting in March. » **Jeff Cork**





Middle-earth: Shadow Of War

Monolith readies two new story expansions

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Warner Bros. Interactive
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Monolith Productions

» **Release**
February (Expansion I),
May (Expansion II)

With Middle-earth: Shadow of War, Monolith Productions delivered on the promise of its Nemesis system. The feeling of building an army to destroy an enemy stronghold was one of supreme satisfaction, and the loop of fortifying your base gave players reason to engage with the Nemesis system long after the story ended. Now, Monolith is readying two downloadable story expansions featuring the biggest side characters. These expansions take place following the main story, meaning the events are directly addressed by the DLC.

Warning: The following text contains major spoilers to the story of Middle-earth: Shadow of War.

The first expansion, Blade of Galadriel, features the elven assassin Eltariel immediately after her final confrontation in the main story. Eltariel recovers the Ring of Power, and Galadriel reminds her of her true mission: defeating the Nazgûl. With a renewed sense of purpose, Eltariel sets off to take on the newest member of the Nazgûl: Talion.

To this point, players' sole engagement with Talion following the story

has been controlling him during his conquests in the post-game Shadow Wars. With the Blade of Galadriel expansion, players experience his transition to ringwraith through the eyes of Eltariel.

"It begins by setting up this conflict between Eltariel and Talion," vice president of creative Mike de Plater says. "We simultaneously get to see her story, have her wield the New Ring, and dig a bit deeper into Talion's story as well."

Because of Eltariel's long-standing devotion to combat the Nazgûl, the expansion provides a unique opportunity fight the protagonist of the series. In addition, players learn the backstories of additional Nazgûl in this expansion.

Though Eltariel is in possession of the Ring of Power, she doesn't use it to dominate orcs like Talion does. Instead, with Mordor shaken by the events of the story, she finds orcs who are looking to establish their places within the new balance of power. This opens new approaches to battles and fortresses as Eltariel works with her allies. This expansion adds new orc

roles and abilities, which can import to Talion's campaign.

Eltariel has a distinct moveset from Talion, as she dual-wields blades and uses the Light of Galadriel. Her faster style is complemented by her ability to seamlessly fire arrows like how Talion can quick-throw knives. The Light of Galadriel lets her blind enemies, setting them up for devastating executions, and grants her area-of-effect attacks and shields. Rather than using the Ring's domination abilities, Eltariel uses it to amplify her powers, making her even deadlier in battle.

The Blade of Galadriel expansion takes place in the regions from the main game. If you want to explore a completely new area, the second expansion, Desolation of Mordor, puts you in control of Baranor in the desert region of Lithlad.

After the completion of Baranor's questline, he and Idril escaped east to start a new army and open a new front in the war against Sauron. This expansion makes more substantial alterations to the game's systems. The most significant change is that Baranor isn't a wraith, nor does he have a Ring



of Power to resurrect him. This means that when he dies, the mode ends, giving it a roguelike twist.

"You get your second chances and your allies can save you, but if that all falls through, you're actually dead and you're back to the beginning of that run-through again," de Plater says.

Progress is lost, but certain things carry over to your next playthrough, such as equipment, gear, and some of the levels you've unlocked. In addition, you don't need to replay some story missions unless you want to. However, you're back to square one with the expansion's primary goal of conquering Lithlad. Your allies and enemies are re-rolled and randomized at the start of each run.

As another consequence of Baranor not having a Ring of Power, he is unable to bend enemies to his will to have them fight in his ranks. Instead, he raises an army of human mercenaries to fight the orcs in the region. This allows him extra follower slots, meaning you can assign multiple followers to deploy during different situations.

This fundamentally changes the way you interact with the Nemesis system, as money plays a central role in building your army. Each mercenary you can hire has distinct identities, skills, strengths, and weaknesses to consider. "You can hire better and worse mercenaries to take and hold



and defend the different outposts in the desert as you're conquering it," de Plater says. "We wanted to explore what the Nemesis system would look like with humans and not just with orcs."

Baranor's humanity also means he isn't as graceful as Talion or Eltariel. However, his more grounded abilities are augmented by Torvin, the hunter from Shadow of Mordor. Torvin provides Baranor with myriad gadgets to help him traverse the map and fight enemies more effectively. For example, Torvin gives Baranor a

grappling hook, which can be used to zip around faster, and a glider that he can use to cover great distances or attack enemies from above.

Once you have Desolation of Mordor, you can also visit Lithlad as Talion and conquer it as you have the other regions. One of Monolith's biggest successes with Shadow of War was giving players new and exciting ways to interact with the Nemesis system. These expansions take even bolder liberties with the established formula to give fans plenty of reasons to revisit Mordor. » **Brian Shea**

The Lord Of The Rings Living Card Game

Slinging cards with Sauron

» **Platform**
PC

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player
Online Strategy

» **Publisher**
Asmodee Digital

» **Developer**
Fantasy Flight
Interactive

» **Release**
2018

The free-to-play card-game scene on PC is vibrant and full of choice, and Fantasy Flight Interactive is bringing all the Gandalfs, Frodos, and Gimlis you can muster to the fray.

Unlike many popular digital trading-card games, The Lord of the Rings Living Card game is a solo or co-operative experience. Players travel to defeat the evil computer-controlled Sauron through quests and battles. There's no ladder to climb, no metagame to pull from, and the experience is more about creating your own unique strategies – and possibly playing with a friend to take on hordes of Uruks, orcs, and more on carefully curated adventures. While the game has existed for some time offline, the PC version of the game seeks to take advantage of its digital nature, and includes some cards and features that are not found in the physical version.

Players craft an entourage of heroes and build complementary decks

around them. You can take all of the big names from the franchise, starting with a roster of Aragorn, Eowyn, Frodo, and Gimli – though more can be unlocked with either cash or in-game currency. Since it's a living card game, card packs are not randomized, and you always know what hero and cards you're getting when pulling the trigger. If you want Samwise and his associated cards, you can get them without buying a load of blind-box style fare. Arm yourself with swords, shields, allies, and other boosts to your selection of three heroes before setting out to quest in popular Lord of the Rings environments, like Mirkwood Forest.

Branching paths make each attempt at a quest different, providing different bonuses and play conditions. Selecting which path to take after each encounter depends on your hero composition and deck makeup.

No matter what you pick, Sauron tries to stop you every step of the

way. Sauron places new threats like Warg riders, spiders, and other classic Lord of the Rings monsters and villains in your way as you work toward the objectives. The challenge comes from trying to maneuver through each scenario while keeping your party of hero characters alive. If they are all exhausted, the mission ends and you have to try again. Succeed, and you earn rewards that can be used to acquire more characters, cards, and quests.

While the title is a focused experience that is easily enjoyable solo, you can bring a friend along to play and take on Sauron's wicked armies with you. In a world with so many competitive card game options that pit player against player, The Lord of the Rings Living Card Game Online looks to be a refreshing option for deckbuilding teamplay. I'm looking forward to selecting the heroes I want to play with and making my way into Mordor later this year. » **Daniel Tack**





TAKE OUT ANGELS AND DEMONS. ANYTIME

Bayonetta's back with butt-kicking moves on Nintendo Switch. Wield wild weapons and execute deadly moves to take out angels and demons in this breathtaking action game. But it's not just about brawn – it's also about style. Bayonetta is deadly but sleek, with moves like Witch Time that slows down time itself, and Umbran Climax which summons Infernal Demons to devastate enemies. Heaven and Hell won't know what hit them.

INCLUDES
BAYONETTA
FULL GAME DOWNLOAD*


Developed by PLATINUMGAMES INC.

***Download code for Bayonetta is only included with purchase of physical version of the game.**
Game and system sold separately.
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MATURE 17+
M
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes



Soulcalibur VI

Returning to the stage of destiny

» **Platform**

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Style**

1 or 2-Player Fighting
(Online TBA)

» **Publisher**

Bandai Namco

» **Developer**

Bandai Namco

» **Release**

2018



For many fans of this genre, Soulcalibur represents their own maturation with 3D fighting games. The original title in arcades and on the PlayStation (titled Soul Blade for the home port) eschewed the trade-heavy mechanics of other 3D fighting games and focused on balancing defense equally with aggression. When the series hit the Dreamcast and officially branded its transformation with the name Soulcalibur, the weapon-based fighter became the face of 3D fighting games trying to push the edge of balanced combat.

It has been six years since the last game in the series, Soulcalibur V, which debuted on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. While the mechanics of the fifth

game were solid, fans were perturbed by the new cast of characters who were mostly spiritual successors to and children of the well-known previous cast. Soulcalibur VI seems to right this issue by rebooting the game's story and bringing the cast back to mostly old favorites with some new characters sprinkled in.

In the latest build of the game, Bandai Namco added several fighters to play around with after revealing the game with only Japanese samurai Mitsurugi and Athenian warrior Sophitia. Frequent contestants such as the bo-staff-wielding Kilik and the sword-destroying Xianghua have entered the arena once again. Fan-favorite Nightmare is also in this build, still looking to satiate his evil sword with blood.

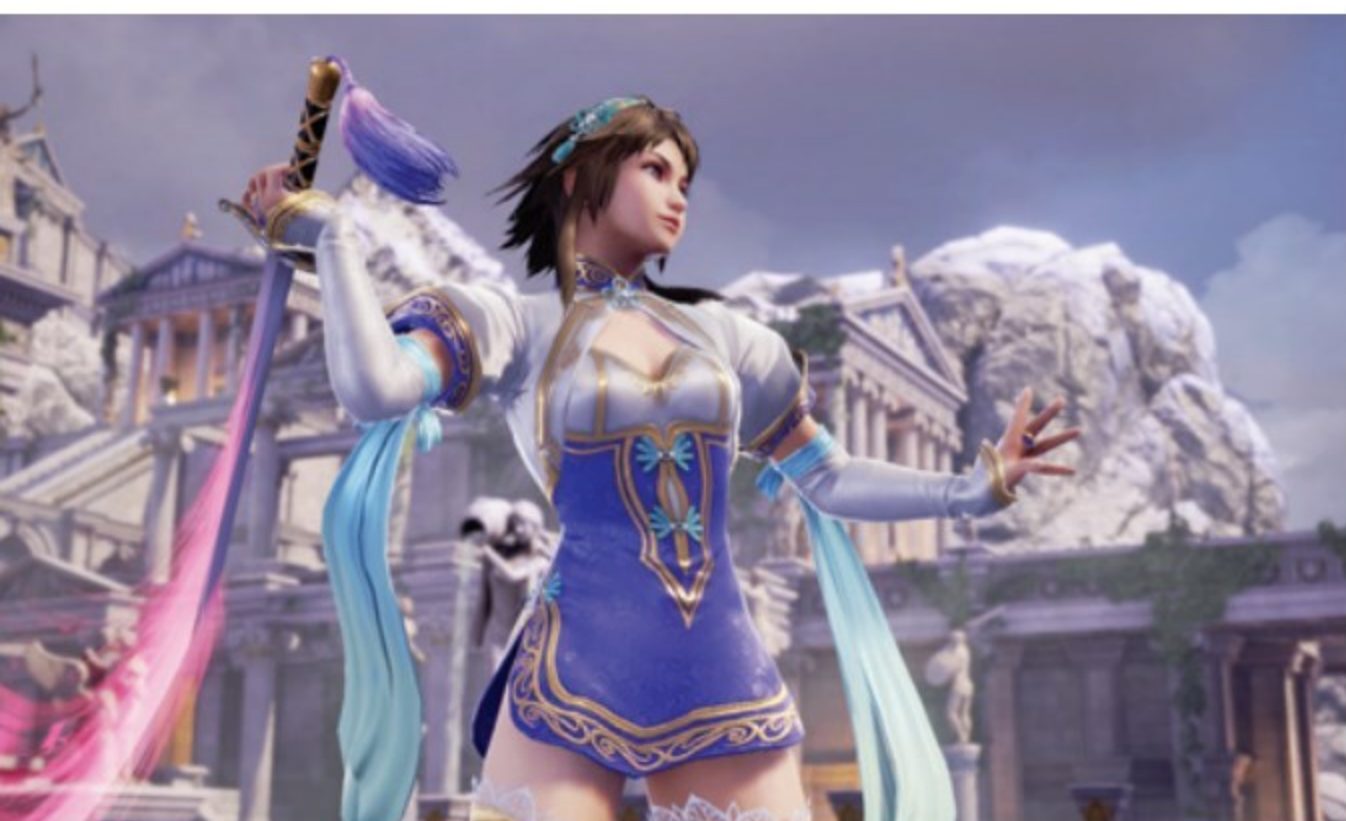
The new character, Grøh, appears to be an assassin with an eyepatch and dual blades that can connect to each other for a glaive-like weapon and split apart for quicker knife-based attacks. Grøh has the personality of a heel, beginning each battle with dismissive and condescending remarks to his opponent. His design is suspiciously modern, though the eclectic nature of Soulcalibur's fashion sense might dismiss the notion that he has anything to do with this game's time-travel shenanigans.

While Bandai Namco has been

quiet for the last five years on how exactly Soulcalibur VI would reinvent the wheel, it becomes plainly obvious after playing the game that the team is following the modern trend of easing the execution burden in favor of reading your opponent. While the game controls similarly to Soulcalibur V, it moves at a faster clip, and encourages predicting how the other player is going to act.

The new Reversal Edge mechanic pits you and the other player in a game of rock-paper-scissors, allowing you to break out of combos and gain meter depending on how well you guess your opponent's moves. A kick beats a high attack, a horizontal attack beats a kick, a high attack beats a horizontal one, and a player too slow to react will lose no matter what they pick. While you're rewarded for guessing correctly, you have to guess fast to take that advantage.

After my time with Soulcalibur VI, it seems Bandai Namco is trying to modernize the series in line with what makes current fighting games fun while also trying to retain the soul of the series. As a reboot, a lot of its virtues are going to come from a carefully cultivated cast of characters with just enough new sprinkled in to make it interesting, so it remains to be seen how well the studio balances on that wire. » **Imran Khan**





Xenoblade Chronicles 2

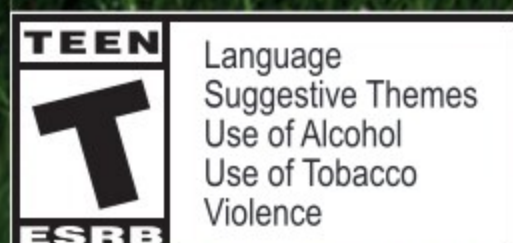
"Towering monsters and gorgeous views..."
– Game Informer

"Every minute of gameplay exudes pure adventure..."
– DualShockers



BATTLE ATOP MASSIVE TITANS. ANYWHERE.

As the world descends into chaos, you must search for the fabled Elysium, the ultimate paradise. Explore as Rex and Pyra as you take on fantastical beasts on the backs of colossal titans. Only powerful blades can save the world from turmoil.



Game and system sold separately.
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Photographs

You must tell a story

» **Platform**
PC • iOS • Android

» **Style**
1-Player Puzzle

» **Publisher**
EightyEight Games

» **Developer**
EightyEight Games

» **Release**
Summer

Luca Redwood made a name for himself with 10000000 in 2012, a fun match-three RPG hybrid with a great soundtrack. It won our best mobile-exclusive award that year, and its follow-up, *You Must Build a Boat*, earned a spot on our 2015 hot 50 list. Those two games are fast-paced puzzle games with strong replay hooks, but for Redwood's next game, he's slowing things down to focus on narrative.

"My niche is threading the needle between the casual and the hardcore," Redwood says, referring to his previous games. For *Photographs*, he is still trying to appeal to that type of player, but he's doing so with a series of five stories, each with their own distinct puzzle mechanics. "I call them tragedies," Redwood says. "I always saw the pitch as, imagine if *Black Mirror* was a game.

Redwood wants to keep the stories a surprise, but was willing to detail one of them in order to explain how *Photographs* will work. The Journalist's

Story follows a writer running a newspaper that has long been the family business. The newspaper, called *The Uplift*, shares positive stories about the community, but it's losing money as readers have become cynical and more interested in negative stories. "He's cramped in this situation between, 'Okay, these are the values of our publication, and our publication is going to fail and I am going to have to close my family business. Or we can change our publication to reflect the values of dissent and hate,'" Redwood says.

The gameplay of this particular story plays out like a word puzzle where you are forming words, trying to clear a board of letters. "When you finish that character's story, that entire puzzle's mechanics are completely thrown away, because it was specific to that story," Redwood says. "If you try to put those puzzle mechanics in another story, it doesn't tell that story. Which, in retrospect, maybe was a bit of a mistake? Because it turns out making five games is harder than making one

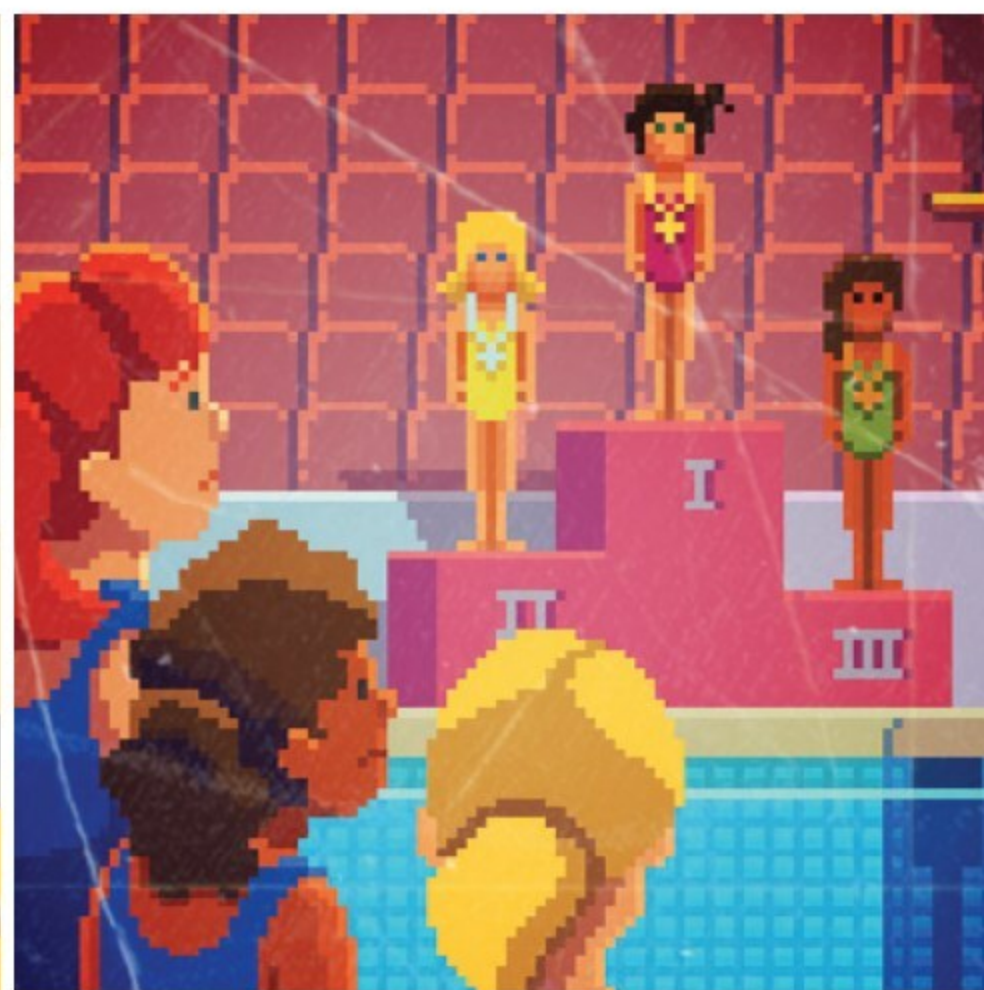
game. But I think it works well and evokes the right emotions, even if it doesn't explicitly say so." The five stories will have ties to one another, but can also be experienced individually.

Redwood is planning to release *Photographs* on both mobile platforms and Steam, as he did with his previous game, and he's curious to see how the game will be received. He wants it to remain engaging throughout, even if it's short, and avoid the typical puzzle game idea that there must be hundreds of levels. "I basically teach a game, and then throw it away afterward, so it's all killer no filler," Redwood says. It's the style of game that he likes – short and to-the-point experiences. "I don't know if the larger archetype wants to see the bullet point saying, 'Over 900 hours of gameplay!'" Redwood says. "For me, two hours of gameplay is a big tick in the plus column, but for others it might be a big tick in the minus column, so I am not sure how that is going to go."

» **Kyle Hilliard**

Pixels Huh

Luca Redwood did his own art for all of his games, but for *Photographs*, he is working with Octavi "Pixels Huh" Navarro, who most recently did the art for Terrible Toybox's *Thimbleweed Park*. Navarro is known for large pixel-art pieces with lots of detail and small stories peppered throughout. "I knew that he was right for this project, so I thought rather than try to do an approximation myself, why don't I just get this guy to do it?" Redwood had been trying to work with Navarro for years, but their schedules never lined up until now. "It looks a lot better than my own art. I drew some prototypes, and I sent them to him and he makes them look significantly less embarrassing."



Metal Gear Survive

Living off scraps and wormholes

Though it retains the mission-based structure and gameplay of Metal Gear Solid V, the “Survive” in Metal Gear Survive is more than a title. After a brief introduction to Dite (the otherworldly location members of the Militaires Sans Frontières are transplanted to) in a near-final build of the game, I quickly notice I have both hunger and thirst meters to monitor. This at first made me wary (I’m not usually one for survival games), but after playing for about two hours, the loop of gathering resources, slowly building up a base, and poking at zombies with metal pipes through barbed-wire fences has officially piqued my interest.

Feeding myself is simple enough. Vergil AT-9, an A.I. pod I find at my new base, locates a nearby puddle and flock of sheep milling about an oasis. I find a bottle to store the water in before drinking it, then sneak up on a poor sheep and stab it with a metal pole. Before eating my prize, I take it back to base, where a campfire lets me cook the raw meat I gathered to maximize its healing effect. In the process my pole loses durability. These survival aspects seem downplayed compared to other games; my pole survived my entire playtime, and I found myself eating only one piece of cooked meat per mission.

Survival is important, but so is stealth. Sneaking into a base to recover a motherboard for information, I encounter a number of zombies my trusty pole alone won’t be able to kill easily. When I’m eventually spotted, I have a new tool at my disposal: a fence. Having crafted a few at a bench earlier, I’m able to deploy one on the spot via wormhole. I then stab the mass of zombies through the wires with my pole. While it felt weird to use a melee weapon in the gun-dominated world of Metal Gear, piercing zombies five at a time is satisfying.

As with most Metal Gear games, it doesn’t take long for Survive to get weird. Although I fight several zombies in the first few missions, things get dire when I enter a massive toxic dust cloud that requires a gas mask and oxygen tank to endure. Here my visibility and map are limited, and colored lights piercing the fog are the best way to find my objective. I’ve been sent into the deadly area to activate a wormhole teleporter, which acts as a form of fast-travel. While scrounging for resources near the pod, I encounter a safe, which I can approach a few different ways. I can either pick its lock via minigame or hack away at it with

my pole, which (along with failing the lockpicking minigame) alerts nearby zombies to my presence.

Activating the wormhole pod initiates a timer, during which I must defend the pod from waves of zombies. It starts off easy enough, with me poking at two or three enemies through a fence. At the one-minute mark, however, at least two dozen more zombies devastate the two fences I’d built to ward them off. My machete cuts down a few of them, but it’s clear I won’t be able to kill them all. When the timer expires, however, it causes an explosion that

eviscerates all the remaining zombies and leaves me in the clear.

Whether Survive’s loop of amassing resources to keep yourself alive remains fun for long is still up in the air, but I enjoyed my limited time with the game. Exploring MGSV’s map for resources is still fun, and the toxic areas add an interesting new layer. Players will need to maintain a constant online connection in order to play even in single-player. Hopefully, everything I’ve seen comes together when the game launches in a few weeks.

» **Suriel Vazquez**

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player
Online Action

» **Publisher**
Konami

» **Developer**
Konami Digital
Entertainment

» **Release**
February 20

Vergil acts as a guide, pointing you towards objectives and food sources



Although geographically similar to MGSV’s first map, the world of Dite has a few twists of its own



Onrush

Former MotorStorm developers' new take on racing mayhem

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One

» **Style**
1-Player Racing
(24-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Codemasters

» **Developer**
Codemasters

» **Release**
2018

Onrush is another racing game from Codemasters – which is on quite a streak with recent successes Dirt 4 and F1 2017. However, this arcade racer is a new flavor for the company. Not only is Onrush's chaotic, close-quarters beating and banging not a sim-based title, but the story behind Onrush's development team is also different.

Onrush game designer Paul Rustchynsky and assistant game designer Jayme Brayshaw came from Evolution Studios – the studio behind DriveClub and MotorStorm, which Sony shuttered in 2016. Thankfully Codemasters swooped in and acquired the team, bringing them in the fold but also letting them work on their own project – Onrush.

Echoes of Evolution titles like MotorStorm appear in Onrush, but Onrush's philosophy of intense pack racing is based on something more fundamental. Rustchynsky says the game was inspired by classic touchstones of childhood arcade memories and the desire to “focus on the fun, remove the frustration, and bring back a genre within racing that just isn't being tapped into right now.”

Arcade racing isn't just about coming in first place, it's about having

a good time getting there. To encourage this, Onrush wants to keep players racing within a pack at all times, fostering a feeling that you're never out of the race but that you can't rest on a lead, either. Seeing how the game handles that fine line between giving stragglers hope they can catch up without hampering those at the front will be interesting. Accordingly, the game keeps everyone competitive by not punishing minute mistakes, resets crashed-out cars back in the thick of the action, and allows respawning players to change their vehicle to encourage experimentation and new strategies. Tracks' layout also reinforces Onrush's pack philosophy through encouraging the use of alternate routes which don't thin out and separate competitors.

Another subtle and difficult trick Codemasters wants to pull off is changing players' racing mentality, de-emphasizing concern for your specific place in the pack by switching your focus to a series of immediate, short-term payoffs. “Pretty much every other genre does it better than racing does in terms of consolidated periods of action, chaos, payoff, and everything else,” says Brayshaw, “like multiple times every 30 seconds in a

first-person shooter and the likes of Rocket League. You get those payoffs constantly. Racing games don't tend to do that until it's the two cars as they are going head-to-head as they approach the finish line.”

Onrush's competitive spirit still remains, through speed boosts gained by near-misses, tricks like barrel rolls, high speeds, and crashing into other vehicles. Using boost fills up your Rush gauge, which culminates in a glorious 10-second burst of speed and power that can turn a match. Overall, Brayshaw says boost isn't a precious commodity that should be hoarded, but rather constantly used and chained together.

Other Onrush details such as its various modes, team-based play, online/DLC plans, and the strengths and weaknesses of its vehicle lineup are still to come, and I am very curious how the game feels from moment-to-moment. The team's goals are not unique for an arcade racer, but I also think Rustchynsky and his crew are asking the right questions and looking into the proper areas. This gives me hope that Codemasters can take a simple premise and make it possibly something spectacular.

» **Matthew Kato**



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MLB The Show 18

Hitting for contact

» **Platform**
PS4

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Sports
(2-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Sony Interactive
Entertainment

» **Developer**
San Diego Studio

» **Release**
March 27

The baseball offseason is relatively short; it doesn't take long to move on from crowning one champion, turning the page, and looking for the next one. Despite this quick turnaround, MLB the Show creator San Diego Studio isn't rushing MLB the Show 18. The team has taken a new, studied approach to the game, instituting a community alpha to address gameplay and online issues that hampered the last title. This is just the first step in evolving its powerful dynasty.

The last game's launch was a networking mess, with frequent lag, results not registering with the servers, and general poor performance across multiple online modes. For MLB 18, the dev team has spread processing

across multiple servers for less bottlenecks and better registering of game results. They also instituted means for responding to crises more timely.

Gameplay, online or off and no matter the mode, is certainly the title's foundation, and the team wants to refine and strengthen the hitting fidelity. Part of making hitting better is communicating the results of a player's swing and why the ball did what it did. "We're really trying to expose as much of the back-end logic that sort of drives the hitting engine to the user in really sort of easy-to-understand feedback components," says senior designer Lance Lahey. Part of this is a redesigned swing analysis HUD, and timing/plate coverage indicators.

Lots of work has also been done to both include new animations (over a 1,000 so far) and fix problematic situations like being stuck in animations. A particular point of emphasis is catchers responding to blocked balls – hundreds of new animations were captured addressing this problem, as well as dropped strikes and pitchers covering home. Similarly, the tagging system has been redone to properly occur in myriad situations, including tagging out runners from different angles or with an outfielder's bare hand.

Situational awareness will also be evident in how players react to what's going on in the game. More appropriate emotions are shown for an early inning double – from both teams as well as the crowd – as opposed to one in the ninth. The post-season brings its own emotions, but we don't know yet if this extends to larger contexts such as hitters in a slump or teams on a five-game losing skid.

Plenty of unknowns remain for MLB The Show 18 at this point, including how Road the Show's narrative story is progressing, the next step for Diamond Dynasty, and improvements to the game's other modes, but the response to last year's game and the team's changes so far point in the right direction. » **Matthew Kato**

The crowd will react more appropriately to what happens on the field



Dragon's Crown Pro

Getting the party back together

If you played the original Dragon's Crown when it came out in 2013, you probably remember it for its gorgeous art, fun battles, and cooperative multiplayer. Dragon's Crown Pro allows you to revisit those memories, bringing the entire package (including all of the post-release updates) to PS4, but with the added benefit of 4K support and a new version of the soundtrack.

I spent a couple hours of hands-on time with Dragon's Crown Pro, and I was instantly enthralled again. It's an homage to old-school arcade brawlers, but with enough of an RPG hook to keep you invested. You fight fantasy

monsters, gain levels, explore alternate pathways, and go up against impressive bosses. Plus, co-op buddies (local and online) can join you for the whole ride, which results in an entertaining mix of chaos and strategy.

The core gameplay holds up well, but the good parts here were always good; the additions Dragon's Crown Pro brings are limited in scope. The new 4K visuals and soundtrack are great, but they were also great before. Dragon's Crown Pro doesn't add any content beyond some tweaks that the old PS3 and Vita versions also get, which means hardcore fans won't

see much new. Old save files can be carried over to the newer version, but upgrading really isn't necessary since players on all three platforms can still team up together.

When developer Vanillaware released a new version of Odin Sphere in 2016, it made major enhancements that revamped the gameplay and introduced new systems. Though players returning to Dragon's Crown should not expect the same drastic overhaul, this PS4 version is a great place to start for those who have yet to experience this lovely and addictive adventure.

» **Joe Juba**

» **Platform**
PS4

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player
Action/Role-Playing
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Atlus

» **Developer**
Vanillaware

» **Release**
Spring



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Kirby Star Allies

Mixing, matching, and cooperating

» **Platform**
Switch

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player
Platforming

» **Publisher**
Nintendo

» **Developer**
HAL Laboratory Inc.

» **Release**
March 16

Kirby Star Allies, the pink puffball's first outing on Switch, sticks to what Kirby does best: absorbing enemies and adopting their abilities for his own adorable ends. Though there isn't a major new twist on that formula like in Kirby Mass Attack or Planet Robobot, Star Allies takes some of the best bits from other Kirby titles and mashes them together to create something new.

Star Allies' biggest shakeup are helpers (which first appeared in Kirby Super Star). These are allies Kirby can

create by chucking a heart at certain enemies instead of eating them. The helpers have their own abilities, but Kirby can also absorb other abilities when they're at his side. This leads to some interesting ability-mixing, such as combining a Chilly's icy breath with Kirby's upward water spout to create waves of ice shards that fill a large part of the screen. Kirby can have up to three helpers with him, which could make for a diverse mix of abilities as players make their way through another adventure.

Helpers also factor into Star Allies' other big feature: co-op. Up to three other players can take control of Kirby's ad-hoc friends, letting them control a bit of the chaos that comes from mixing and matching four abilities. When playing alone, the three helpers simply follow Kirby around.

Kirby does have a few new powers at his disposal. The Artist ability lets him paint images on a canvas that break free and attack enemies, while also giving him a paintbrush attack that can easily dispatch foes. The Spider ability, along with giving Kirby a fun new hat and hairdo, grants him the power to cover enemies in webs, then kick them at other enemies. Other notables include a train ability (which let him ride along walls with ease), as well as classics like the Cutter, Yo-Yo, and Bomb hats.

A few of the bosses Kirby will fight on his journey have also been revealed. Fan-favorite Meta Knight returns, though fitting with the theme of the Allies, he's brought a few copies of himself to the fight. Francisa, a general whose theme is ice, fires off refracting beams of cold for players to dodge.

Kirby might not have the household recognition of Mario or Zelda, but the plucky little guy has had several solid outings over the last few years. Hopefully, Star Allies continues that trend, offering fans a mix of what they love about the series, while also letting friends join in on the fun.

» **Suriel Vazquez**



Mario Tennis Aces

Avoiding a double fault

In 2015, Mario Tennis: Ultra Smash on Wii U was an underwhelming entry in the long-running sports series thanks in large part to a lack of content. Nintendo and developer Camelot hope to avoid another misstep with Mario Tennis Aces, the series' debut on Switch.

At its core, Mario Tennis Aces is the same as its predecessors; you select

your favorite characters from the Mushroom Kingdom before squaring off on the tennis court. However, Aces introduces new strategic elements that encourage you to respond to your opponent's position and stroke to gain the upper hand in a long rally. It looks like if you choose the correct stroke and positioning, you can even unleash a massively powerful smash that can

knock the racket right out of your opponent's hand.

For the first time since Mario Tennis: Power Tour on Game Boy Advance, Aces includes a story mode where players can expect to put their tennis skills to use in unconventional ways. In story mode, you tackle a variety of missions, minigames, boss battles, and more. One boss battle has you face off against Petey Piranha as you smash the tennis ball back at him, while another mission has you volleying fireballs spit at you by a bunch of piranha plants. The mode also has a hub world where players can choose which stage to enter.

Though we don't know much about Mario Tennis Aces, it appears Camelot has learned lessons from Ultra Smash's lukewarm reception. The upgrades to the core gameplay, as well as the new content that comes with a full-fledged story mode should alleviate many of the problems people had with the last entry in the series. Hopefully these changes are as impactful as they appear to be, but we won't know for sure until Mario Tennis Aces launches on Switch this spring. » **Brian Shea**

» **Platform**
Switch

» **Style**
1-Player Sports
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Nintendo

» **Developer**
Camelot Software
Planning

» **Release**
Spring



The game likely features more characters, but so far we've seen Mario, Luigi, Wario, Waluigi, and Donkey Kong in action



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Student work by: John Rogeles & George Stoll



gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH

84 Monster Hunter: World

Serving up excitement for newcomers and veteran fans, Monster Hunter: World provides countless hours of boss battles that are fun solo and even better with friends. From lowly skirmishes to acquire your first set of armor and forged weapons to epic Elder Dragon encounters that put all your skills to the test, the franchise thrives in its return to consoles.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	All non-Labo cardboard.

AWARDS

gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
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Monster Hunter: World

Majestic monsters and where to find them

9.5

gameinformer
OF THE
GAME MONTH

gameinformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action (4-Player Online) Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom Release January 26 Rating T

PS4 • Xbox One

» Concept

Take on a variety of challenging titanic beasts, by yourself or with friends

» Graphics

This is the best Monster Hunter has ever looked, though the backdrops can be a little dry at times

» Sound

From terrifying roars to explosive traps, the sound triumphantly conveys critical information and creates immersion

» Playability

The onboarding process and accessibility is better than ever, but newcomers should still be prepared to spend some time learning the nuances

» Entertainment

Intense battles, rewarding progression loops, and excellent multiplayer experiences make this the best Monster Hunter to date

» Replay Value

High

The latest game in the Monster Hunter franchise brings the core elements that have made the franchise a cult classic – difficult battles, fun and interesting progression, and stomping on dinosaurs with your friends – and opens the door for a deluge of new players with a more accessible sheen. Make no mistake, hearty challenges are still at the center of the experience, so veterans won't be disappointed with the colossal end-game leviathans. In addition to serving up what fans expect from the franchise, newcomers also have a chance to dip their toes in before being shoved out into the ocean and can enjoy a slightly more accessible ramp.

Monster Hunter: World is the most accessible game in the series, and funnels new players into the core systems and mechanics over the first 20 hours of the game. The first low-rank hours are comfortable and casual, followed by more challenging high-rank fare and an expanded armor and weapons system, and then finally, Elder Dragons. End-game hunts put your skills to the test, and hopefully after all the progressive challenges leading up to them you're ready for some serious battles and top-tier rewards. This clear segmentation works incredibly

well, providing a linear path that slowly ramps up both enemy difficulty and the underlying options for your gear. When the credits rolled after about 60 hours, I was eager to get right back into the mix for more post-game fun. The intense task of bringing down an Elder Dragon and reaping the rewards provides a double-shot of dopamine to the brain, and you just want to roll back in and take on another.

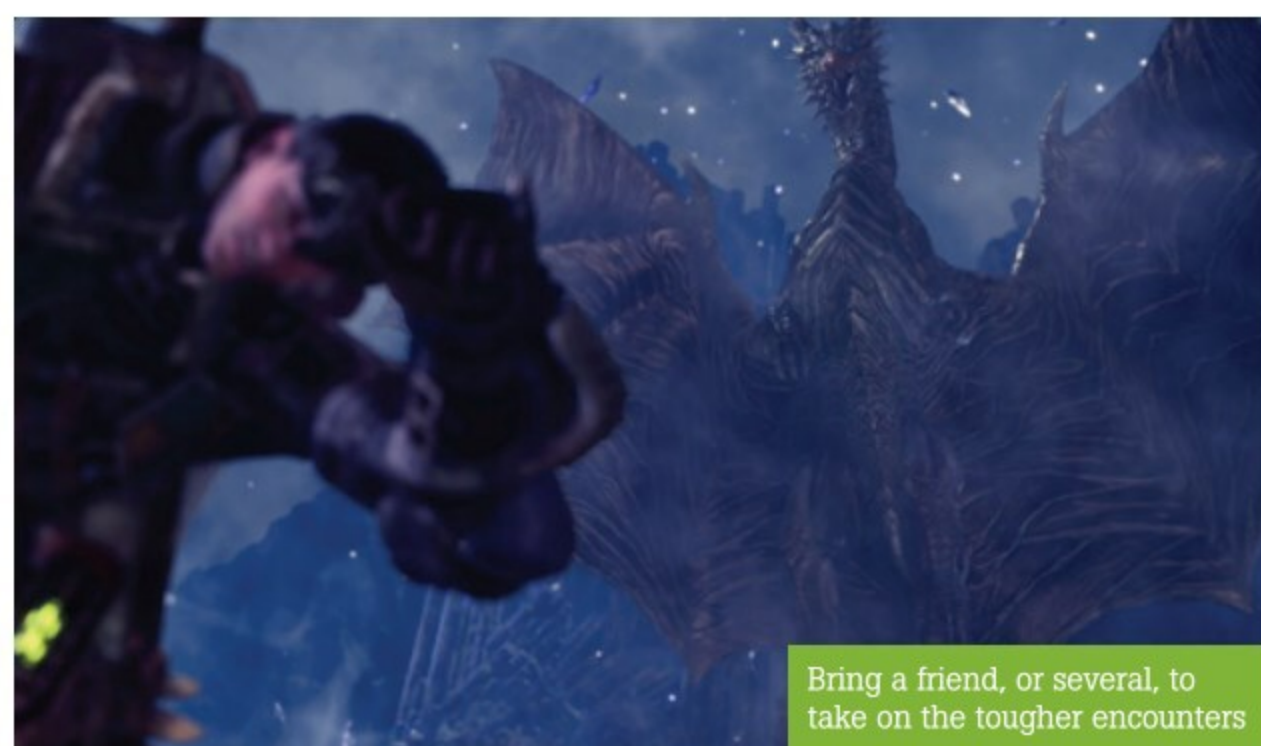
The progression loop is simple but enchanting: Go out, hunt monsters, use their parts to make new and exciting weapons and armor. As you progress, more customization options unlock along with powerful set bonuses, allowing you to create a potent mix via set pieces and decorations (gem slotting for bonuses).

An element of exploration adds to the experience, as you stumble upon all manner of interesting things out in the wild, from new Palico tribes and gadgets, creatures to collect and put in your house, and undiscovered monster clues that can lead to a dangerous, wild ride. While each area is its own instanced piece of the larger world, each feels distinct and interesting. Every time you come back to the main city of Astera, there's something new to engage with as well, like sending out

your Palico squads to hunt for you in previously conquered areas, upgrading your food options in the canteen, collecting the fruits of your harvest, or checking out the new goods that come into port via ship.

The streamlining of certain franchise staples is a boon for both newcomers and veterans. Instead of dealing with annoying paintballs and guessing games during the hunt and chase, scout flies are a great solution. These helpful insects provide a tracking experience that feels natural and immersive as you collect tracks and other clues around an environment that lead to their habitats. Learning more about monsters from tracking, hunting, and capturing fills out your research library in the town hub, allowing you to get a comprehensive look at monster weak spots, elemental strengths, break-off parts, and drop tables. Studying these entries is an extremely useful way to learn more about the monsters and your approach to beating them. Picking up materials as you run by instead of having to stop is great, and auto-crafting makes annoying activities like refilling your essential consumables a thing of the past.

Monster Hunter: World offers 14 different weapon types that embrace





Forcing monsters to fight each other can be part of a balanced strategy

all varieties of play styles, from in-your-face aggression to long-range bombardment. Weapons are tagged with accessibility in mind, pushing new players toward more responsive equipment that may not require as much setup or methodical combat. But for those who want to show off and test their skills, there are plenty of opportunities. Using a longsword is a much different experience than using a hunting horn, and experimenting with different weapons is a big part of

the fun. Catching up a new weapon to your current tier only takes a few battles, so it's easy to try out a new play style. This adds a good deal of longevity and entertainment to the overall experience.

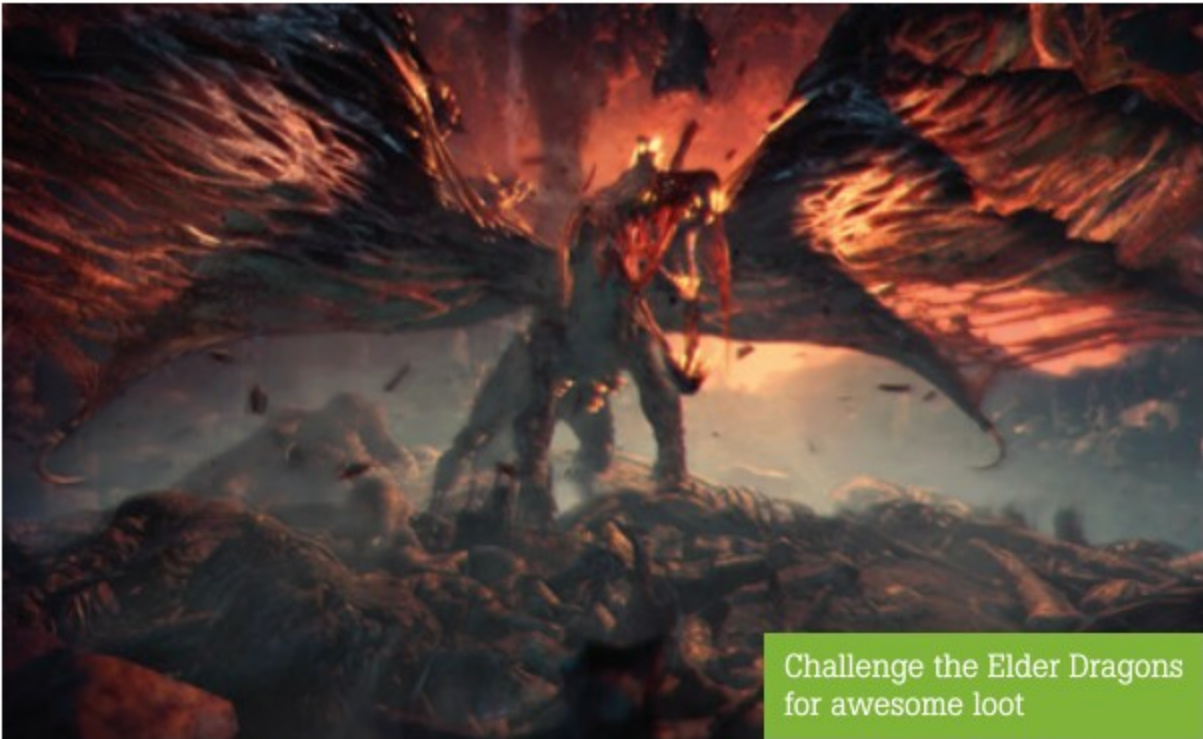
A few quirks drag World down from the heights of greatness. Some frame-rate issues happen from time to time, creating a jarring combat experience, especially when multiple giant monsters are on screen at the same time. Sometimes when you have two or three big beasts in the same area, they won't even really interact or move around unless you're close to the action – which is probably the last place you want to be in that situation. There are a few other minor down points, including one of the story-based battles (that the game has the ridiculous notion you'd want the opportunity to play more than once!) being a miserable slog that's more of a trial of patience than a battle with a monster. When playing multiplayer, you must wait for a friend to complete story-based mission objectives before joining in their quests as well, but in the grand scheme of things these quibbles can be overlooked.

Monster Hunter: World is the best game in the series, and a welcoming gateway for newcomers to get in on the tail-chopping, rodeo-riding, and titan-slaying action. I never want to play the series on handheld again after this, as the grainy graphics and clawed clutch can't compare to the redefined experience core platforms facilitate. » **Daniel Tack**

This review pertains to the PS4 version of Monster Hunter: World. The game is also available on Xbox One



Learning the ins-and-outs of each monster's attacks is essential to survive



Challenge the Elder Dragons for awesome loot





Dragon Ball FighterZ

A champion welcoming all challengers

9.25



Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (6-Player Online) **Publisher** Bandai Namco Entertainment
Developer Arc System Works **Release** January 26 **Rating** T

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept

Make a Dragon Ball fighting game worth investing in while letting casual fans in on the fun

» Graphics

The characters and vibrant ki blasts are almost indistinguishable from their anime counterparts. The backgrounds don't fare as well, however

» Sound

Many of the sound effects are directly lifted from the series' library, or are great recreations.

The voice acting is occasionally spotty, but mostly improves the wacky script

» Playability

The combos and battles are an explosive delight no matter your skill level, but a high ceiling rewards practice, creativity, and quick thinking

» Entertainment

Dragon Ball fans have plenty to enjoy in single-player, while fighting enthusiasts get a fast, dense game full of options

» Replay Value
High

Dragon Ball FighterZ accomplishes a difficult task: taking fighting games and licensed products and broadening the appeal of both. With its gorgeous characters and explosive combat, it wonderfully captures what has made Dragon Ball such an enduring power fantasy. With a steady learning curve and simple-but-varied combat, it is immediately rewarding as a fighting game, but also has the potential to turn average players on to the fun of learning, adapting, and improving through competition.

A casual glance at the team-based, 2D fighting of Dragon Ball FighterZ could be confused with an episode of the Dragon Ball anime. Every frame of animation during fights looks immaculate, and exchanges regularly have an over-the-top bombast to them that made me feel cool just for being a part of them. Throws are a flurry of punches and kicks that sends opponents flying at top speed, and fatal super moves cut to a shot from space of a planet-shattering explosion.

For all the action's faithfulness to its source material, the biggest accomplishment is how the fighting underpinning it slowly reveals its layers. Rather than be quarantined to a simple mode that eschews creativity in favor of flashiness or automatic combos that are useless in a real fight, one-button strings are an integral part of combat. Characters like Beerus or Piccolo have automatic attacks that are useful in disorienting

opponents and can lead to longer combos. Even my early matches, in which both my opponent and I fumbled combos and spammed the same moves repeatedly, were fun.

You also have a number of easy-to-use maneuvers at your disposal, and a great mix of dashes and double-jumps make movement feel incredibly free-form. Once you have the hang of them, the variety of flashy ways you have to close the distance and start a combo helps you diversify your strategy. Is your opponent firing lots fireballs and playing defensively? A super dash breezes past the fireballs, and a vanish may catch them off guard. I rarely felt helpless during a loss (unlike many combo-heavy fighters), which lessened the sting of losing and drove me to think creatively.

The roster also strikes a good balance of varied and simple. You can use the same basic joystick motions, combos, and tactics with the entire cast, so switching characters doesn't feel like learning an entirely new game. But as I tinkered with various characters, I found exciting new tricks I could use to deal more damage using double-jumps, fireballs, and swapping in a teammate. Kid Buu, for example, has great long-range options with his stretchy limbs, Android 16 can amp up combos and break defenses using his crushing pile-drivers, and Hit can stop aggressors in their tracks with counter moves.

If the complicated terms and rhythms of fighting don't appeal to you, you can head directly to the story mode. This single-player campaign clocks in at a



Characters like Android 18 and Captain Ginyu call upon other characters to help them during battle



meaty 15-18 hours, and offers a great starting point for Dragon Ball fans. Between cutscenes you make your way through simple board game-like maps where you navigate your party through spaces, leveling up party members and swapping them out after each fight on the way to each boss. Which fights you choose and in what order are mostly irrelevant, since they don't present much of a challenge until the last couple of hours.

The real draw of the story mode is listening to voice actors ham it up as classic Dragon Ball characters (even if some reads tend to miss their mark), as well as some of the more lighthearted conversations that draw on and poke some fun at the series' extensive lore. What does Gotenks think of the Great

Saiyaman? Why would the Ginyu Force blindly follow all of Frieza's orders? These clever scenes are good for a laugh and occasional insight, and were my main motivation for completing the story mode.

Between matches you can roam around an online lobby, which acts as a central hub for players to communicate, set up private fights, watch replays, and take on the world in ranked and casual matches. Private matches and party matches (six-player brawls where one person controls each character) are confined to local lobbies, which makes them difficult to set up.

You earn zenny as you play more matches and work through the various modes, which you use to purchase capsules that randomly drop new

avatars and stamps. This system exclusively uses in-game currency (no microtransactions), so it feels fun rather than exploitative.

Dragon Ball FighterZ seamlessly blends accessibility and complexity, making for a feverishly paced fighter that makes the learning process gradual and engaging, and gives casual players hours of worthwhile things to do solo and potentially turning fighting game fans on to the world of Dragon Ball. Even after dozens of hours in single-player, training mode, and online, I'm excited to keep digging into its combat and see just how many more gorgeous flashes and explosions I can cause. If I happen to blow up a few more planets along the way, all the better.

» **Surriel Vazquez**



The camera shifts to show the best angle during special moves, often emulating scenes from the anime



Lost Sphear

Misplaced nostalgia

6.5

Style 1-Player Role-Playing Publisher Square Enix Developer Tokyo RPG Factory Release January 23 Rating E10+

PS4 • Switch • PC

» Concept

Parts of the world are vanishing and you must restore them in this homage to 16-bit RPGs

» Graphics

Minimalist visuals leave much to be desired, especially the uninspired dungeons

» Sound

The music isn't terrible, but the repetition and lack of variety makes it wear out its welcome

» Playability

Simple controls and easy-to-understand battle mechanics are hindered by poor navigation and difficulty spikes

» Entertainment

The combat is fun and the plot takes some interesting turns, but that doesn't change the frustrating design and tediousness

» Replay Value

Moderate

As RPGs evolve and adopt more modern complexity, it's refreshing to revisit the classic mechanics that helped make the genre what it is. Like *I Am Setsuna* (the previous title from developer Tokyo RPG Factory), *Lost Sphear* tries to capture the 16-bit era, paying homage to classics like *Chrono Trigger* and *Final Fantasy*. However, just like its predecessor, it fails to offer much beyond nostalgia. *Lost Sphear* feels like a journey I've taken before; it is a bland return to yesteryear without the novelty.

Lost Sphear places you in a world that's disappearing bit by bit. Protagonist Kanata possesses the ability to restore the world's memories. This puts him on a journey to discover why he has these powers, what they mean, and save the world along the way. The plot has its share of predictable moments, and the majority of the twists are visible from miles away. Intriguing developments don't happen until late in the story, which is also when characters finally start growing beyond their archetypes, like the childhood best friend and the hard-headed loner.

With boring and excessively drawn-out dialogue, *Lost Sphear* makes it challenging for players to stay invested. This is especially apparent in the ending, which extends over several fetch quests and bosses, not to mention an epilogue that takes hours to finish despite the fact your quest is apparently complete. Once the game focused more on the world's

origins and evolution, I became more interested, but it's too little, too late.

Since *Lost Sphear*'s storytelling is nothing special, combat and customizing your characters' skills are the key attractions. The ATB system from *I Am Setsuna* has improved, allowing control over character placement. You can now line your heroes up to target multiple enemies in a single strike. Better yet, you can also use movement to space out your party members so they're not all caught in deadly AOE attacks. The momentum gauge returns, allowing you to power up your attacks when a blue flash hits the screen. You also eventually get access to *Vulcosuits* – powerful mechs that add interesting strategy to battle. The limited points available to use *Vulcosuits* make you plan when it's best to bust them out, especially since they can't be restored without sleeping at an inn or using a rare item.

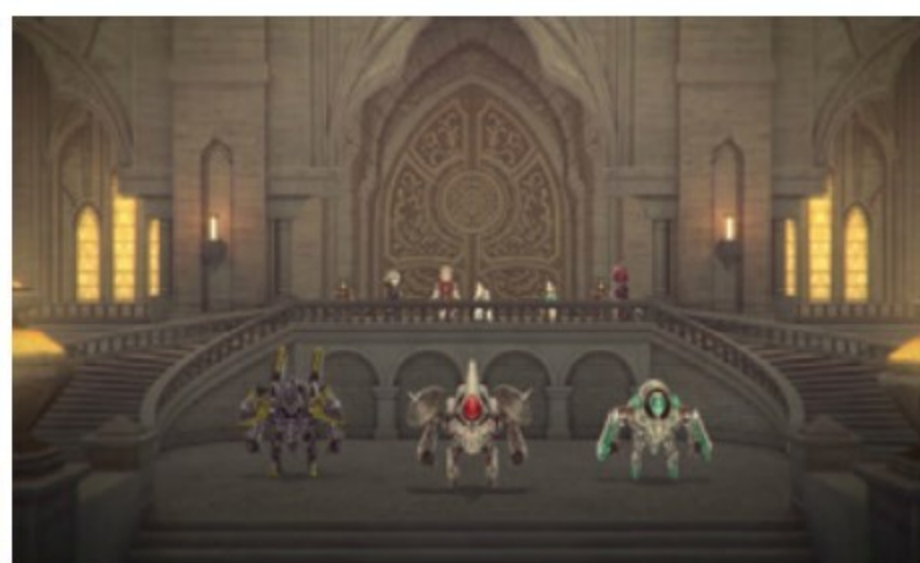
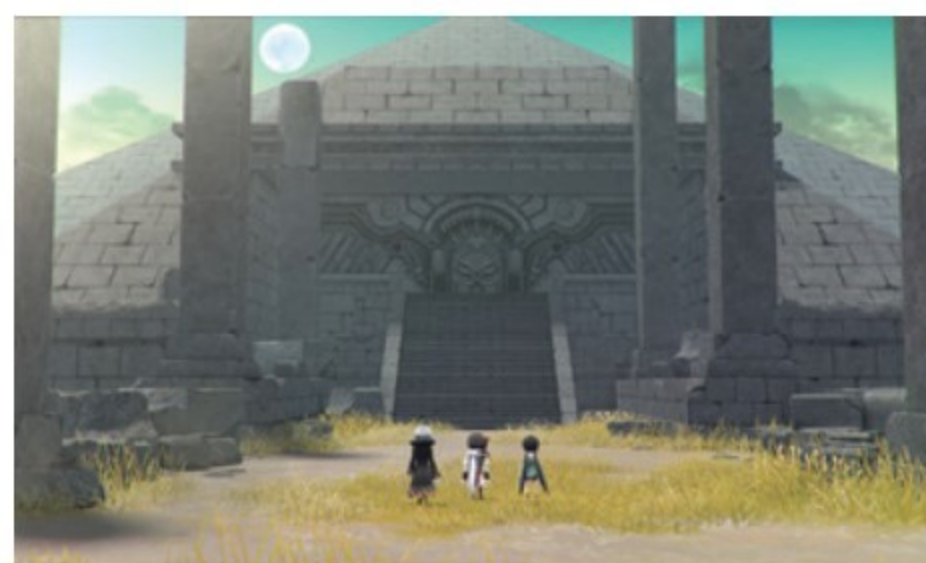
Building your party members' abilities offers a great amount of depth, and is my favorite part of *Lost Sphear*. Depending on your collected memories (items you find while you fight enemies and explore), you can trade for new skills, counters, and momentum perks to equip on your characters. These have effects like activating a follow-up attack after using a skill, restoring HP, and increasing your defense. By restoring parts of the vanishing land with artifacts, you also get powered up, from increasing critical hit rates to speeding up ATB charge rates.

Taking advantage of all these tools is essential, as battles get downright

vicious later in the game. Enemies frequently use instant death attacks, resurrection potions, and self-destruct abilities. These fights are flat-out frustrating because you might kill a boss without knowing it has a destruct ability that can wipe your entire party. Or maybe you begin a fight and your foe wipes half your party with its initial strike, something you can't prepare for. I expect a challenge from end-game enemies in RPGs, but these battles often feel unfair, and simply grinding levels doesn't solve the problem.

While I reveled in proving myself in battles, the same can't be said for the exploration. I dreaded its repetition, specifically the backtracking, which is baffling given *Lost Sphear*'s short length of about 25 hours. You visit the same places and fight the same baddies multiple times. You can also expect to spend more time running errands and searching for things than making meaningful progress. This is compounded by vague directions and a lack of quest markers; finding my next destination became a challenge itself, adding frustration to an already-tedious element.

Lost Sphear has some good ideas and mechanics working together when it comes to battle, but everything else falls short and feels dull. The reused dungeons, backtracking, and slow-paced story don't offer much to fight for, even if the end does come together in an interesting way. Sadly, the tedious grind through a milque-toast adventure is sour for far too long before paying off. » **Kimberley Wallace**



Navigating the world map gets better once you get your boat and airship



You must restore parts the missing parts of the world



The Inpatient

A dull stroll through the sanatorium

Style 1-Player Adventure **Publisher** Sony Interactive Entertainment **Developer** Supermassive Games **Release** January 23 **Rating** M

6.5

PSVR

» Concept

Play as an amnesiac patient who must escape a sanatorium filled with horrors

» Graphics

Uninspired environments make areas feel barren rather than interesting

» Sound

Effective sound design, such as the noise of thousands of bugs crawling across walls, add to the unsettling atmosphere

» Playability

The DualShock 4 controller is your best option, since the Move controllers are awkward to use

» Entertainment

Despite providing some interesting backstory for the Until Dawn universe, my enjoyment of The Inpatient is held back by dull characters and inconsistent scares

» Replay Value

Moderate

By poking fun at slasher films and providing a captivating interactive horror experience, 2016's Until Dawn was a pleasant surprise. Developer Supermassive Games' successful storytelling made me hopeful for Until Dawn's VR prequel, The Inpatient, but I struggled to keep interest due to mediocre scares and a forgettable cast.

The Inpatient takes us back 60 years and is set in the Blackwood Sanatorium, the dilapidated hospital you explore in Until Dawn. Playing as a patient with amnesia, you attempt to unravel a conspiracy and escape, all while savage monsters are on a killing spree. Although The Inpatient sheds more light on some of Until Dawn's mysteries (such as the slaughter of the sanatorium staff), it fails to make this history interesting.

Like Until Dawn, your choices mold the story and have consequences. These decisions occur during dialogue with other characters, and they impact who lives and dies. Unfortunately, it never feels that tense, since the game is plagued with dull characters. Most of the hospital staff you're grouped with seem emotionless, and are held back by stiff voice acting. Because it's a short narrative experience, you don't get much time to become acquainted with them.

Since the narrative changes based on your choices, you can replay The Inpatient to see its different endings. While I didn't notice any huge revelations or entirely new sections open up, I was happy to see some noteworthy changes when making different decisions on my second playthrough, depending on how much others trusted me and who I managed to save.

As for its VR component, Supermassive took another step to add a sense of presence. With voice controls, you can choose dialogue options simply by speaking into the headset's microphone. Though it's a small addition, I found it effective and fun, making it feel like I was directly speaking to other characters.

Good scares are few and far between, but some made me jump or shout obscenities because they were up close and personal in VR. Physically turning around to find a monster appear out of nowhere and seeing bloodied bodies appear and disappear on stretchers is terrifying. With the headset strapped to my face, I couldn't look away and had to face these fears. I enjoyed exploring green-hued nightmares that tormented my character, where I'd walk through an otherworldly version of the sanatorium. Voices whisper unintelligible words while cell doors open and close on their own, making it a frightful experience. The Inpatient is at its best when it delves into psychological horror, but these nightmarish sections make up only a small portion of the game.

As you make your way through the hospital, often your only light source is a flashlight. This was initially spooky, but long stretches of time are spent walking through barren hallways without much happening. Lacking interesting dialogue and effective scares, these sequences left me bored as I wandered through the sanatorium.

As you explore, you can use either the PlayStation Move controllers or the DualShock 4 to maneuver. I found it much easier and comfortable to use the standard DualShock 4 controller, as the Move controllers are more awkward.

You have to click a button on the left controller to move forward while tilting the other controller in the direction you want to go. I grasped the controls better as time went on, but it never feels natural. One advantage is that one Move controller also acts as a flashlight that you can wave around to light up areas, making it feel like you really have one in your hand.

VR is great for immersion, but it can cause some unwanted side effects. Luckily, The Inpatient's camera limits your movements to 30-degree pivots, reducing the chance of nausea. That worked for me; I never felt queasy during my time with The Inpatient, though I did experience headaches after about an hour of use.

The Inpatient is a difficult game to recommend, with inconsistent scares and a mundane cast. It still offers some frightful moments, but they aren't wrapped up in a captivating enough narrative to keep you engaged. Even if you're a hardcore Until Dawn fan, this watered-down horror experience is probably worth skipping. » **Elise Favis**

Who lives and dies can depend on your dialogue choices, which can make for several different outcomes each playthrough



Shadow Of The Colossus

On the shoulders of giants

9

gameinformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Sony Interactive Entertainment
Developer SIE Japan Studio, Bluepoint Games **Release** February 6 **Rating** T

PS4

» Concept

Take the 2005 PlayStation 2 classic and update it beyond even the 2011 PlayStation 3 HD remaster by remaking the entire game

» Graphics

Environments, colossi, Agro, and every character (except for Wander) look fantastic and breathe new life into a familiar setting

» Sound

The remastered music sounds great. I did encounter one colossus where the musical cue seemed slightly misplaced, however

» Playability

Updated technical capabilities afford improved control over the original game. The default controls also modernize the button layout for a smoother experience

» Entertainment

Shadow of the Colossus is a masterpiece, and developer Bluepoint has done a fantastic job bringing it to a new generation

» Replay Value

Moderately high

The PS4 Pro Edge

A few advantages exist if you're playing Shadow of the Colossus on a PS4 Pro. Outside of the expected additional 4K display options, you can also choose to play the game in Performance mode. As the name implies, this mode prioritizes performance, boosting the framerate to 60 FPS. The other mode, Cinematic, lowers the frame rate to 30 FPS, but displays the game in 4K. On a standard PS4, the game plays in 30 FPS. Performance mode was my preferred way to play. The higher frame-rate makes the game lose some of its filmic qualities, but it plays and feels better as a result.

90 reviews

I don't think I am being hyperbolic when I call Shadow of the Colossus a masterpiece. Even among Fumito Ueda's small-but-impressive collection of games, Shadow of the Colossus stands out as my favorite. I know I'm not alone in that, which is why remaking Shadow of the Colossus is a tall and dangerous order. Thankfully, developer Bluepoint was up to the task. While it does not improve on the original game (or the HD remaster from 2011) in every way, this version of Shadow of the Colossus is absolutely worth seeking out for both fans and newcomers.

The biggest and most notable overhaul to the game are the visuals. Remakes are often complimented for allowing you see dated games as you remember them as opposed to how they really looked, but Shadow of the Colossus goes well beyond that sentiment. You can see individual blades of grass as you ride with Agro, and the portals to the sky that appear above defeated colossi take on a new beauty. With so much to look at, the added detail leads to fewer moments of boredom as you travel. It adds more weight to the moments between colossi, and made me more eager to explore.

The new environmental details are impressive, but the colossi are astounding. The beard on the sixth colossus looks better than it ever has. The eyes on colossus number 10, who chases you underneath the sand, have a humanity I've never seen before. The fur in particular, on all the colossi, is especially realistic. Even the new details impress, like a wave that accompanies the bird colossus you fight on the lake as it speeds toward you. Along with looking great, the wave gives the beast more implied weight, and even gives you a better cue for when to jump.



The impact of meeting each colossus has never been lost on me, even after multiple playthroughs, and it has only been elevated for this remake. I gasped at near-falls, and my heart raced as I leapt from Agro's back onto the flying desert colossus just as it did in the past.

For all the visual steps forward, one element falls short. Mono and Agro look great, and even Lord Emon (who had the least amount of detail of any human character in the original) has a new impressive wizened look – but Wander's face looks bad. Something was lost in translation on the way to PlayStation 4, and Wander looks like he has been recast by a younger actor with softer features. Newcomers may not be bothered by his new appearance, but I couldn't get over the fact that he simply never looked right.

A number of other changes are small, but still improve the experience. The original control scheme was atypical, to be polite, and the new default control scheme is more in line with contemporary button layouts (X to jump, circle to roll). Your items are now quick-select on the d-pad, making it easier to quickly change from sword to bow. Changes to the stamina bar also make its upgrade progress clearer, and it uses less screen

space while still offering the necessary information. You also get a detailed list of stats you can refer to anytime, tracking things like distance traveled, time riding fish and hawks, Agro stunts, and your fastest times for defeating colossi. I love stat-tracking, so I definitely appreciate their inclusion.

The option to play a mirrored version of the game after you beat it is one of the few true additions, and it's an inoffensive unlock that doesn't change the game in a substantial way. While the lack of more significant content additions might be disappointing for some, I appreciate how true this remake remains to the original I adore. Bluepoint strikes a good balance, making welcome changes that leave the core experience intact.

The original Shadow of the Colossus is easily one of my favorite games. It was among the first that made me want to violently point at the screen and yell, "Look! Video games are art!" at anyone within earshot. Bluepoint's remake feels different in some respects, but is exactly like Shadow of the Colossus in the important ways. Scaling beasts feels appropriately epic, and the few story moments that exist still tell a heart-wrenching tale of sacrifice in the face of impossible odds. » **Kyle Hilliard**





The Room: Old Sins

Exploring every old nook and cranny

Style 1-Player Adventure **Publisher** Fireproof Games **Developer** Fireproof Games **Release** January 25 **Rating** 9+

8.25

iOS • Android

The touch-screen interface on mobile devices poses a unique design challenge to game makers: How do you make a compelling interactive experience with only one input? Some mobile games get around this problem by awkwardly emulating a controller layout on the screen, while others keep the action so simple that the gameplay suffers. Fireproof Games' *The Room* series is a rare breed that finds balance; it constructs compelling puzzles around a limited interface. You only need one or two fingers to solve most of *The Room: Old Sins*' challenges, but these creative puzzles (along with a haunting atmosphere) engage your whole brain.

Like previous *The Room* games, *Old Sins* is a massive puzzle box that asks you to slowly manipulate intricate clockwork gadgets. Most of the puzzles in *Old Sins* are solved by pushing, pulling, or twisting these objects, but Fireproof combines and remixes these actions in a wide variety of unique ways. I marveled as a miniature bell twisted into a cog in my hands. I stared in wonder at a small mechanical train that came to life after I'd assembled its missing pieces. And I threw my fist in the air triumphantly after repairing an old radio, then deciphered the meaning of its warbled audio. Throughout my adventure, I never felt like I was doing the same thing twice. *Old Sins* features a nice balance between simple and complex puzzles,

and the solutions are never frustrating.

The last few *Room* games expand on this simple puzzle-box concept by adding multiple rooms and a greater variety of objects to interact with. *Old Sins* steps back from that; you spend the entire game investigating an elaborate dollhouse mansion. One of the handiest tools in your inventory is a mystical eyepiece that allows you to see invisible writing and other clues, and this eyepiece also allows you to shrink down and explore each room of the dollhouse as if it were full-sized. I appreciate how this structure allows *Old Sins* to cleverly return to the series' roots of pulling apart one big puzzle box while also providing a wider variety of backdrops.

Several puzzles are cleverly spread across multiple rooms. For example, after I got the plumbing working in the kitchen, that water was piped out into the garden, which led to a whole new set of puzzles that eventually ended when I brought an ornate fountain back to life.

At other times, matching items in your inventory with the environment makes *Old Sins* feel more like a traditional adventure game. Objects you acquire usually have a logical use somewhere else in the house. The base of a model pagoda matches an indentation on a display cabinet, for example. However, I occasionally wondered where to go next. In those cases, *Old Sins*' clue

system always subtly nudged me back on the right track without spoiling any puzzle solution.

Old Sins' puzzles are wrapped around a mystery involving a researcher named Mr. Edward Lockwood who becomes absorbed with his experiments on a strange substance called the null, which seems capable of unleashing an otherworldly horror upon the world. Through scattered notes, I slowly pieced together *Old Sins*' thin narrative about Edward's obsession with the null and the strain it put on his marriage. This story functions like a rubber band collecting all *Old Sins*' puzzles, but I was never excited to find another note from Edward, and I didn't care about going deeper into his disappearance. Over the course of four games, Fireproof has teased a larger narrative for the *Room* series, but *Old Sins* fails to expand on that universe in any meaningful way.

In many respects, Fireproof Games offers more of the same with *The Room: Old Sins*. However, the original concept is so strong that I can't complain about getting more, especially since the puzzles continue to feel fresh and interesting. In a market churning out free-to-play loot-box grinds, this meaty mobile experience is refreshing.

» **Ben Reeves**

This review pertains to the iOS version of *The Room: Old Sins*. The game is also available on Android

» **Concept**

A puzzle box with a haunting, Lovecraftian vibe that uses your mobile device's touchscreen in a variety of fun ways

» **Graphics**

The environments aren't big, but they look so good that they wouldn't be out of place on a modern console

» **Sound**

The ambient audio and effects are subtle, but they add a lot to *Old Sins*' spooky tone. Wearing headphones while playing is a must

» **Playability**

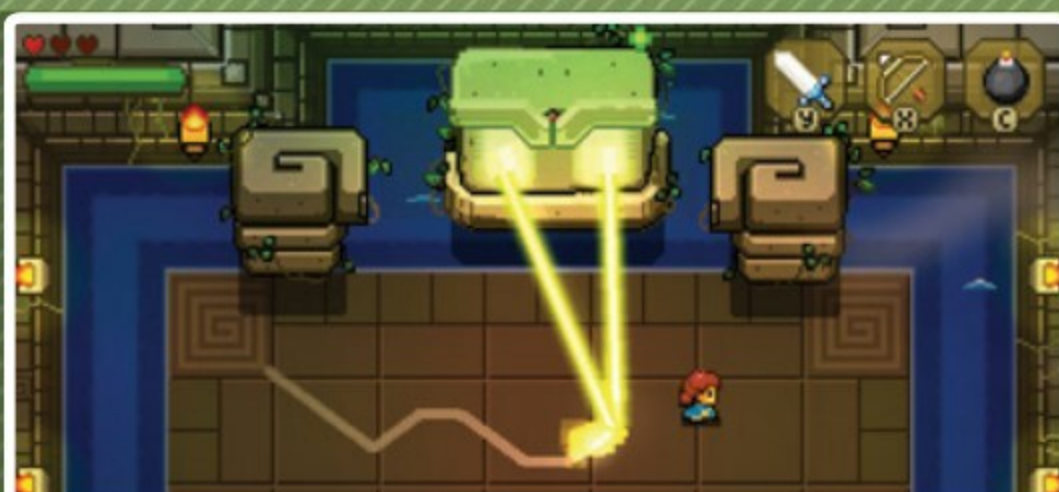
The touchscreen interface asks you to perform a variety of pinches, swipes, and long presses to solve each puzzle, but they feel as natural as manipulating a real object

» **Entertainment**

Like the previous *The Room* games, *Old Sins* remains captivating from start to finish

» **Replay Value**

Moderate



8 Blossom Tales: The Sleeping King

Platform Switch, PC **Release** December 21 (Switch), March 28 (PC) **Rating** E10+

With loads of Zelda inspiration and fun, new takes on puzzles and boss battles within the beloved formula, *Blossom Tales: The Sleeping King* is a delightful take on a familiar style. — **Brian Shea**

7.75 Crawl

Platform Switch, PC **Release** December 19 **Rating** T

Crawl appeals especially to fans of local competitive arcade multiplayer experiences that aren't fighting games. This group is a niche one with a lot of qualifiers, but developer Powerhoof knew exactly who they were going after with the game. — **Kyle Hilliard**

6.5 Brawlout

Platform Switch **Release** December 19 **Rating** E10+

Angry Mob Games has brought its platform fighter *Brawlout* over from Steam Early Access. It caters to the serious *Smash* fans, but without the charm, variety, or recognizable characters. — **Jeff Cork**

7.25 Tiny Metal

Platform PS4, Switch, PC **Release** December 21 **Rating** E10+

Tiny Metal's visual style pays homage to Intelligent Systems' dormant *Advance Wars* series, but its under-baked action isn't as cute. The battles never feel like a chore and I enjoyed basking in my easy victories, but *Tiny Metal* needs a few more tools in its arsenal if it wants to take on the legacy of *Advance Wars*. — **Ben Reeves**

8.5 Sky Force Reloaded

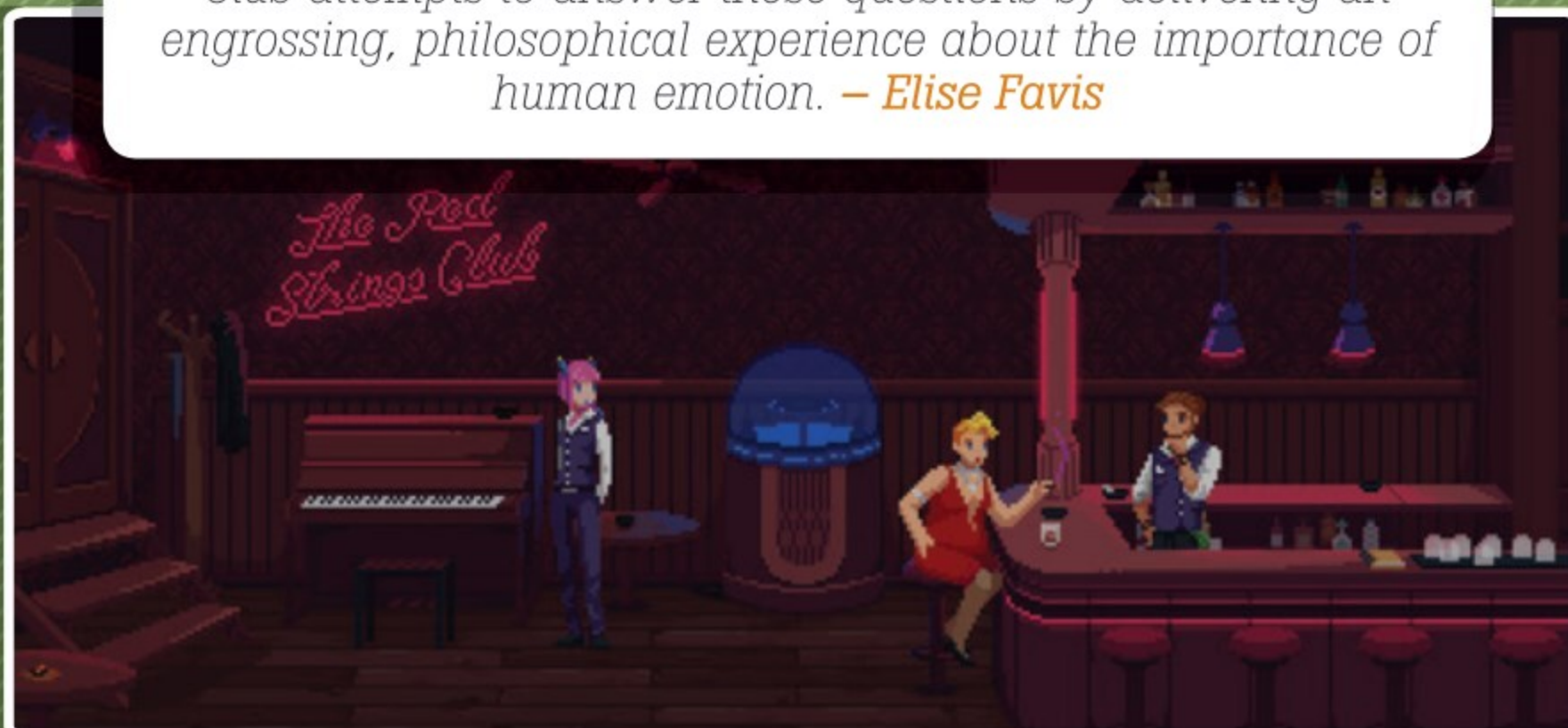
Platform PS4, Xbox One, PC **Release** December 1 **Rating** E10+

I'm torn between what's more rewarding: achieving victory through sheer skill, or annihilating a stage with an overpowered ship. They both define *Sky Force Reloaded*, and show how its gameplay can be exhilarating for different reasons. — **Andrew Reiner**

8 The Red Strings Club

Platform PC **Release** January 22 **Rating** N/A

Can you imagine a world where no one can experience negative feelings? Would it help humanity flourish, or would it brainwash us to be mindless robots? *The Red Strings Club* attempts to answer these questions by delivering an engrossing, philosophical experience about the importance of human emotion. — **Elise Favis**



6 Floor Kids

Platform Switch **Release** December 7 **Rating** E

Despite repetitive gameplay, *Floor Kids* presents a distinct approach to the rhythm genre and allows you to enjoy the music in unique ways. I had a good time in small chunks, but the gameplay of every track just blends together during extended sessions. — **Brian Shea**

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by Javy Gwaltney

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl

How this bizarre Ukrainian cult classic weathers the ravages of time

Andriy Prokhorov was nine years old when his family went to see *Capricorn One* at the cinema. The movie was sold out, so his father instead took them to see a film by Andrei Tarkovsky called *Stalker*. “It was three hours of Oh My God,” Prokhorov, known as “Prof” by his coworkers and the industry at large, recalls. “I received psychic trauma from watching it,” he says in a tone that suggests he’s not sure if he’s joking or not. Years later, Prokhorov, a designer with a Ph.D. in aviation engineering, would find himself leading the charge to adapt the movie and the novel *Roadside Picnic*, the basis for Tarkovsky’s film, into a video game.

Even in the realm of odd and idiosyncratic video games, S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl is a strange beast. Released in 2007, the title emerged as one of the most challenging games of its time. GSC Game World’s ambitious project blended elements of open-world survival, role-playing, and first-person shooters. For many, Shadow of Chernobyl is the ultimate cult-classic video game, often being hoisted up next to other legendarily quirky titles like *Deadly Premonition* and *Pathologic* thanks to its flexible design, interlocking survival systems, nonlinear narrative, and a substantial share of technical issues.

Even years later, with games sporting similar survival mechanics like *Far Cry*

and *The Long Dark*, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. feels stubborn and enigmatic in a way that few games do. You’re expected to figure out how to survive in the barrenness of post-meltdown Chernobyl by avoiding radioactive zones with your Geiger counter, feeding yourself to stave off hunger, and managing your relationships with warring factions of humans while fending off mutants. At times the game feels almost overwhelming with its systems, a belligerently arthouse take on *Fallout* that refuses to make you feel like a hero but instead simply someone surviving by their wits.

The game’s gestation was a complicated one. The seven-year development cycle was conducted by a small

team (around 40 employees) that had no open-world-design experience to speak of and minimal resources. The lengthy development time resulted in the public wondering if S.T.A.L.K.E.R. would ever see the light of day, so much so that back in 2006 *Wired* called it “vaporware.” Publisher THQ brought on longtime game developer Dean Sharpe as executive producer five years in to help make the hard cuts in order to get the game to ship.

The relationship between Sharpe and GSC didn’t take off immediately. “The THQ guy before Dean was really smiley,” Prokhorov says. “One day Dean shows up. Dean didn’t smile. I immediately started hating him,” he continues bluntly. “I would say it took several months before we started working together with full efficiency.” Despite the rocky start, Sharpe played an instrumental role in helping the team launch S.T.A.L.K.E.R. in the spring of 2007.

Critics and gamers quickly took notice to the uniqueness of S.T.A.L.K.E.R., with glowing reviews and solid sales numbers. The team was surprised by the praise; Prokhorov was sure its flaws would cause the game to get dinged hard. “One review started, ‘It has ugly



Combat in the game was more realistic than the vast majority of FPSes for its time, putting an emphasis on weight and accuracy

The game not only forces you to square off against bandits, but hideous monsters that roam the zones as well



GSC decided to set the game in Chernobyl after meeting residents who lived in the area and hearing their enthusiasm

animation! And it's clunky," he says. "However, the very next sentence was, 'Someone please explain to me why I can't stop playing it!'"

There was little time for him to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Prokhorov and a number of other developers who worked on Shadow of Chernobyl broke away from GSC shortly before the game shipped to form 4A Games. The fledgling studio began work on a new series called Metro, which embraced the atmospheric tenants of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. while narrowing the size of the game in order to create something more claustrophobic and horrifying.

"It was like I was leaving my child with another family," Prokhorov says about departing from S.T.A.L.K.E.R. after working on the game for so long. "But we took experience with us. How to make atmosphere and details – how to create a realistic world. The most

important thing we can say about S.T.A.L.K.E.R. is we finished school during S.T.A.L.K.E.R."

The series continued on for a while after the 4A group left, with two sequels being released to praise and decent sales. S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2 was also planned, but eventually got shelved when GSC couldn't hold onto the rights. S.T.A.L.K.E.R. was finished as a series, but the love for the original still burned strong.

The modding community rallied around the game in a big way. Not only are there constant updates and fan patches being released that tinker with the game's systems and improve its visual fidelity, but a particularly ardent patch of fans dedicated themselves to restore the content that was left on the cutting-room floor. Using screenshots, trailers, and build leaks, modders spent several years recreating levels that didn't make the final cut. This

ambitious modification, called Last Alpha, was released in 2014 to acclaim, nearly seven years after S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s retail release, showcasing how strong the game's following still is all these years later.

Beyond the efforts of the fan community, Shadow of Chernobyl lives on in the work of 4A games too. It's hard not to feel S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s lineage in Metro, with gunfights carrying the same kind of weight and tactical consideration to them, as well as otherworldly elements that exist on the outskirts of each title's gloomy atmosphere. Despite the series being left for dead, the design philosophies that made the original game so fascinating are still embraced by a passionate community and are being carried forward by other games. Like one of the mysterious creatures that inhabit the game's version of Chernobyl, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. lives on, hardened and unkillable. ♦

Survival Mode

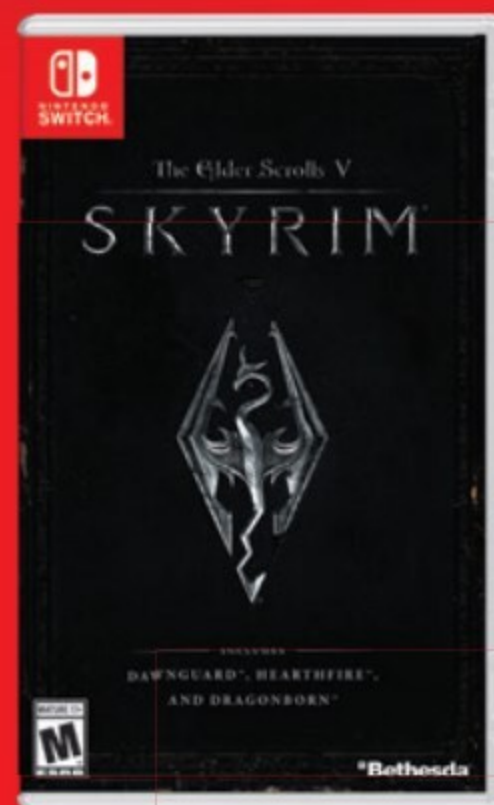
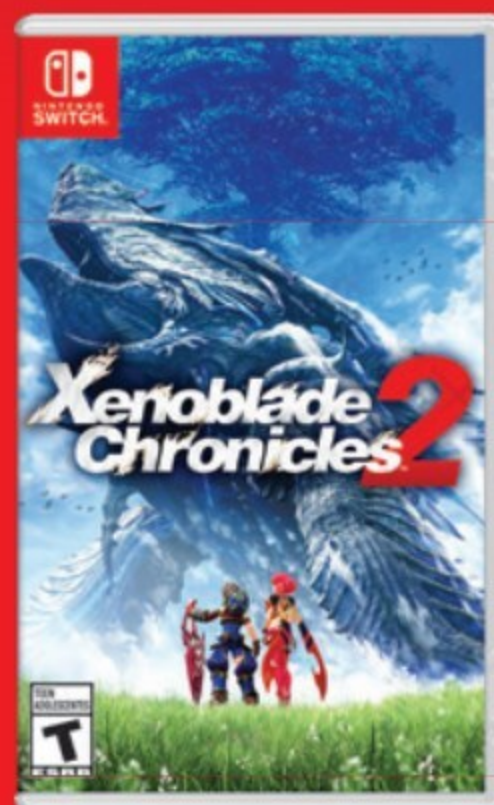
Are you the smartest, savviest wanderer in the wasteland? Prove yourself (and maybe survive another day of nuclear fallout) by answering these obscure post-apocalyptic game trivia. *by Javy Gwaltney*

- Which of these actors has not lent their voice to the Fallout franchise?
 - Keith David
 - Liam Neeson
 - Mickey Rourke
 - Ron Perlman
- Which post-apocalyptic game was released in 2001?
 - Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel
 - Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel
 - Hard Truck Apocalypse
 - Metal Saga
- Which of these is not a faction in the Metro series?
 - The Fourth Reich
 - The Holy Initiates
 - Spartan Order
 - Red Line
- Where does Wasteland 2 take place?
 - Nevada
 - Arizona
 - Montana
 - Mexico
- Who is the composer for the 2015 Mad Max game?
 - Alexandre Desplat
 - Jack Wall
 - Mats Lundgren
 - Jesper Kyd
- In the 1990 game Bad Blood, your mission is to...
 - Save your village from starvation
 - Find a mysterious but powerful artifact
 - Prevent a war between mutants and humans
 - Cure the radiation that infects the world
- What are all the factions in Fallout: New Vegas looking to control?
 - New Vegas
 - The Mojave Desert
 - The Hoover Dam
 - The Capital Wasteland
- Which PC post-apocalypse game has been in development since 2011?
 - The Long Dark
 - Rust
 - Day Z
 - Project Zomboid
- What is the title of the prequel to S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl?
 - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripjat
 - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: 2
 - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Roadside Picnic
 - S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky
- Which of these games was the first successor to Wasteland?
 - Wasteland 2
 - Fallout
 - Fountain of Dreams
 - Bad Blood

Answers 1: C, 2: A, 3: B, 4: B, 5: C, 6: C, 7: C, 8: D, 9: D, 10: C



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